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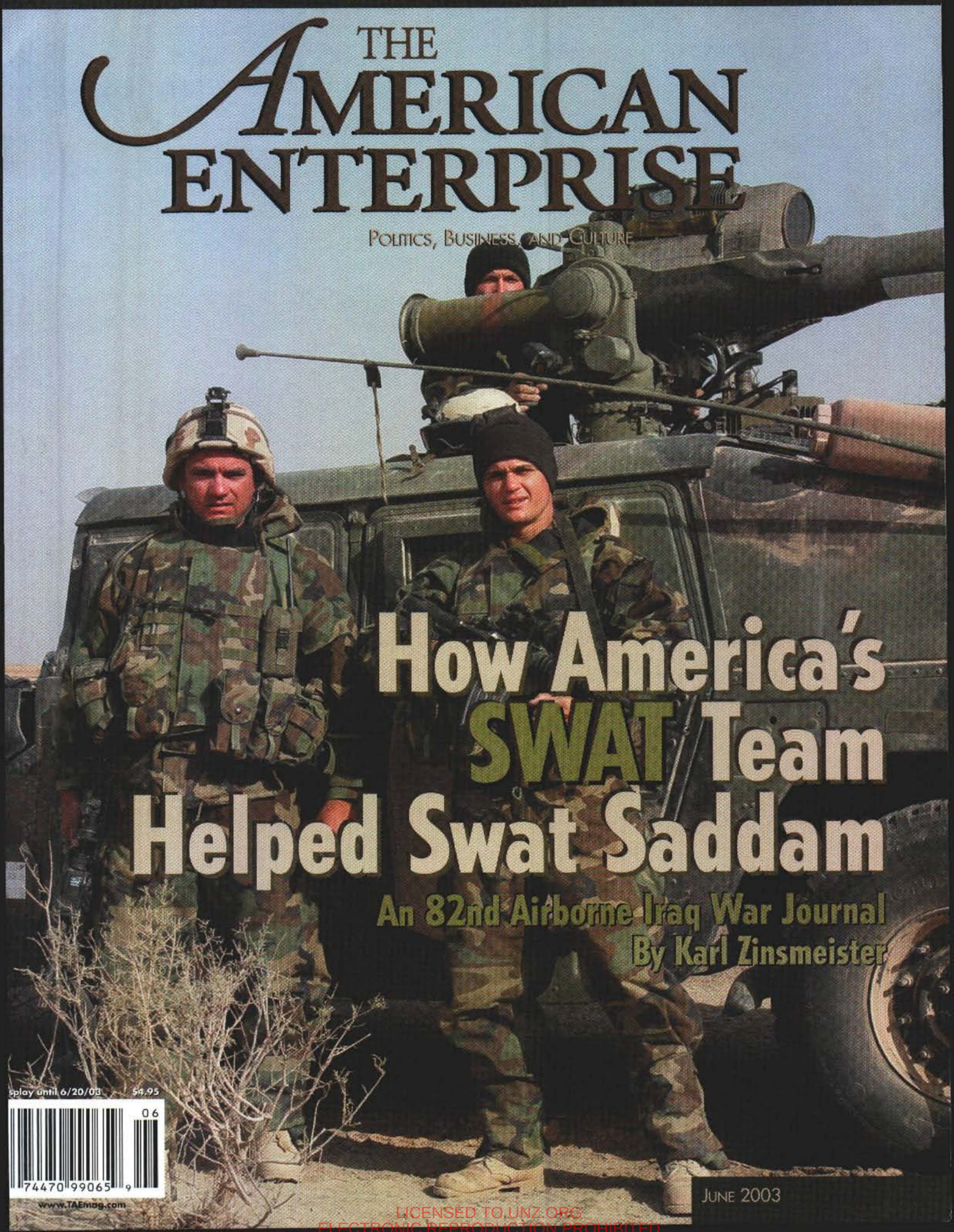

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By Karl Zinsmeister

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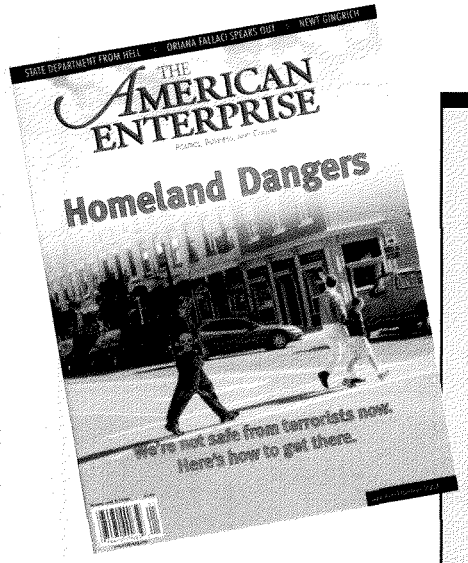

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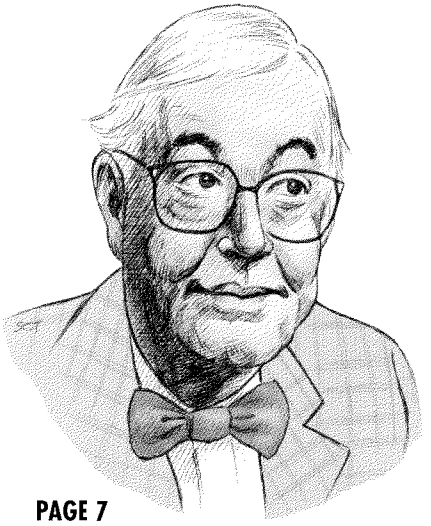

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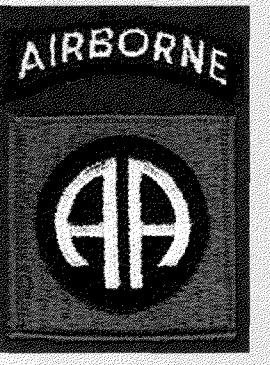

Cover photo: Karl Zinsmeister

The Shadow 21 gun truck and crew:
Sergeant Cory Kroll
Specialist Josh Farley
Private Chad Stapp

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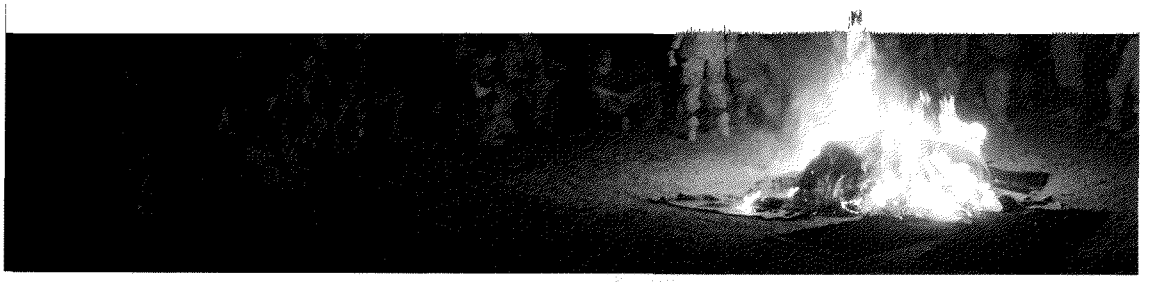

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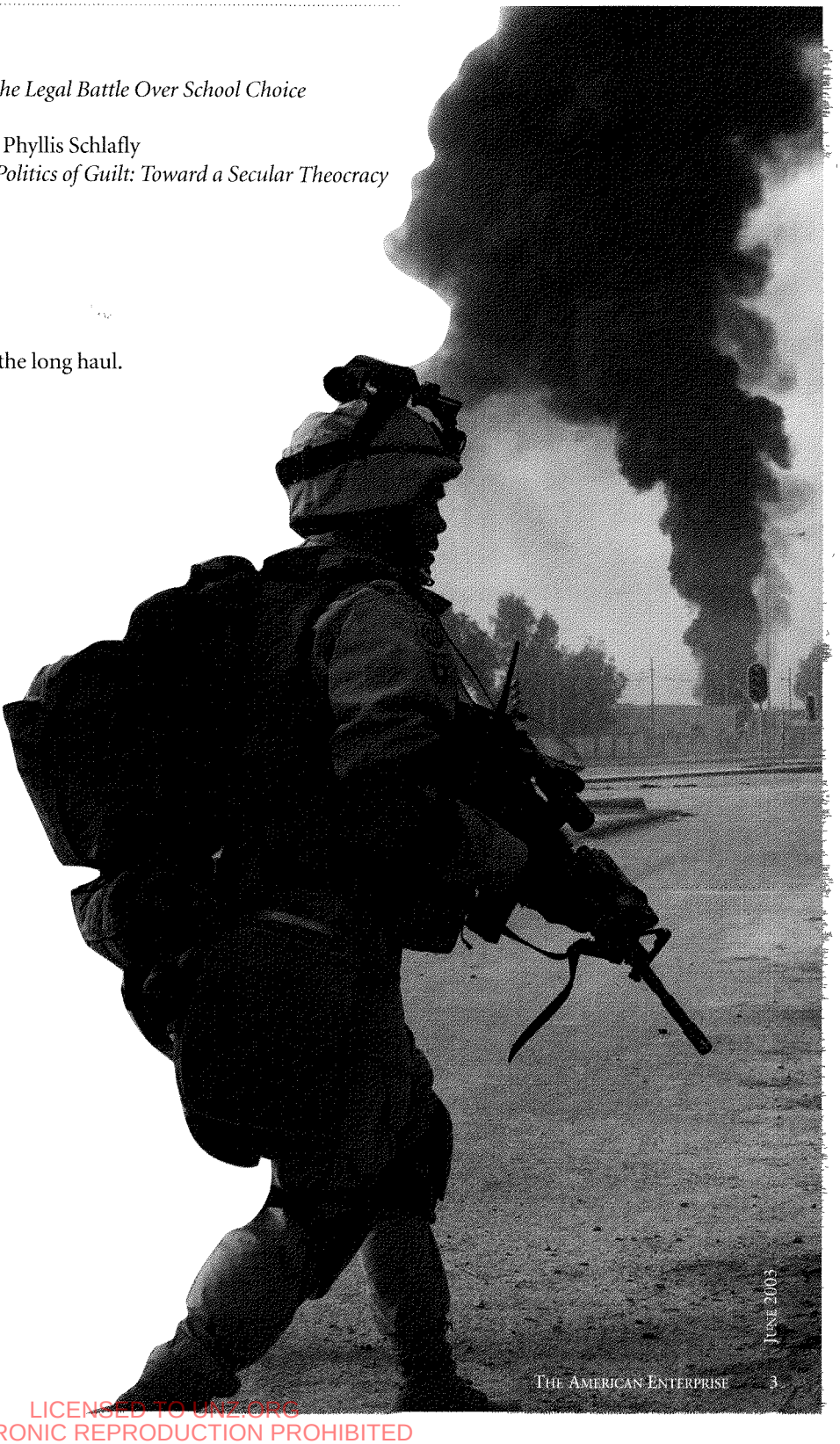

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Bird's Eye

Radek Sikorski

Rise Up, Return, Rebuild

As I write this in early April, the situation in Iraq remains unresolved. Saddam Hussein's militia—the *fedayeen*—takes pot shots at coalition troops and supply lines hourly but, so far, this seems more likely to prove an irritant rather than a prelude to full-scale guerilla war. Whatever its ultimate military significance, however, the resistance that coalition forces have encountered shows that at least some Iraqis are willing to fight and die for the Baath regime. Of course, little doubt exists that coalition forces will eventually get Baghdad firmly under control and face only sporadic resistance in outlying areas. A number of Iraqis will then cooperate in creating a new government. At that point it's important to ask which people, institutions, and laws must be uprooted and which accommodated if Iraq is to become a liberal democracy.

Fortunately, we have recent experience in replacing autocracies with democratic rule: Less than 15 years ago, communist regimes ruled all of Russia and Central Europe. Today, all but a few nations have the fundamentals of free society: elections, a press that enjoys at least a moderate degree of liberty, and private economic activity. In Central Europe in particular, the people saw communism as a system imposed on them by outsiders. Nationalism thus worked in favor of democratic and free market tendencies. Arab societies are different, of course, but parallels exist: Serbia is a rather close European approximation of Saddam Hussein's Iraq. There too, a ruthless dictator justified his tyranny with nationalist appeals, invaded neighboring countries, and ultimately fell as a result of Western military intervention. Today, a relatively democratic government runs the country. In March, however, a former member of Milosevic's security apparatus assassinated Serbia's democratically elected Prime Minister; a tragic illustration of the old order's resilience.

Three major lessons emerge from the Central European experience. For regime change to result in liberal democratic order, a nation must remove the old regime from power, remember its crimes, and dismantle the social infrastructure that supported it. This will be hard for the citizens of Iraq, but not impossible.

First and, perhaps, most obviously, a liberated Iraq will not only require the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, but also of the people who supported his regime. The transition from dictatorship to democracy in Central Europe has worked in many cases, and its success—in terms of vitality and stability of the democratic order—has been greater the more thoroughly the communists were kicked out of government. Democracy is now least reversible in the former East Germany not only because that country has been integrated into the Federal Republic of Germany and the European Union, but also because the East German civil service, police force, and army were thoroughly cleansed of former communist officials. Leaders of the STASI, East Germany's secret police, even stood trial for shooting people trying to escape over the Berlin Wall.

Most countries in Central Europe have helped to create this new order by remembering the crimes of their previous communist governments. In Hungary, a House of

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Terror museum now has its home in the building where the communists tortured their political opponents. In Poland, the Institute of National Memory prosecutes communist-era crimes, and the law forces informers for the communist secret police to declare themselves if they want to run for parliament or be appointed to public office. In the Czech Republic, employers can easily verify whether employees worked for the secret police. In Lithuania, the former KGB office houses a museum to Soviet-era persecution. In East Germany, the state opened secret police files and showed how badly the communist government had damaged the economy and the environment.

We should judge the success or failure of democracy in Iraq by the number of Iraqi exiles who return to rebuild their country.

Thanks to such actions, former communists are forced to flee from their records. They serve as heads of state and government in many parts of Central Europe, but they won elections there by convincing voters that they had changed. All over the region, you would be hard-pressed today to find anyone who would admit to have been a believing communist. I once asked a member of Gorbachev's *politburo*, a former head of the Ideology Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, whether his loss of faith in the system was gradual or if a specific event made him tip. "Do you take me for a fool?" he replied. "I never believed in any of that garbage." In a few more years, some will have us believe that anti-communists ran the Evil Empire.

But things get worse the further east one travels. In Russia, symbols of the old regime, such as the Lenin mausoleum in Red Square, have been left standing and, correspondingly, most of the media toe the authorities' line. Over a decade after communism's demise, there is a country in Europe—Belarus—where the former KGB is still proud to call itself the KGB, with "comrades" and death squads to match. In the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, the same hacks who oppressed their people during the Cold War do it with even more gusto, now that the Soviet Party Control Commission no longer threatens them with surprise inspections.

Building a liberal society on the ashes of a totalitarian dictatorship does not involve simply removing officials and remembering what they did, but also dismantling the social infrastructure that supported them. The threat to democracy in Central Europe today comes not from the average ex-communist, but from the old-boy network yearning for its past glory days. When former members of the Communist Youth League dominate the commanding heights of the economy as well as the judiciary, army, and police, a country can have every outward manifestation of a democratic order, and very little genuine political competition. The corruption scandals which now shake Poland show how difficult it is to make democracy work when the people who are supposed to run the system of checks and balances have greater loyalty to their old "comrades" than the institutions they nominally serve. When businessmen see that more money can be made by bribing members of parliament than by inventing a new product, they spend more time cultivating their political connections than running their businesses. And the sight of former communists prospering politically and financially is deeply demoralizing to those who staked their lives on resisting those very people.

Justice doesn't have to work perfectly for society to operate smoothly, but it needs to prevail most of the time. For civic virtues to flourish, public life must reward the good rather than the ruthless. Iraq could follow one of many paths. Fifteen years hence it could be like East Germany—decisively, if not perfectly, integrated into democratic institutions. Or, it could continue along the same lines as Uzbekistan: A ranking member of Saddam Hussein's army or security apparatus could take over and continue things much as they have been for the past 30 years.

In a country where democratic traditions are weaker than in Central Europe, in which the ruling party is indistinguishable from a criminal racket, it would be a mistake to expect liberty to blossom as soon as the tyrant falls. Iraq needs democratic colonization on the East German model. Fortunately, there is a group of people who can fulfill the role of the West German civil servants and businessmen who took the new states under their wing when the Honecker regime gave up the ghost in the East: the expatriates.

The Iraqi diaspora, spread all over the world, is the only group of Iraqis who have experience with democratic life, who know the rules of the globalized economy, and who are largely untainted by collaboration with Saddam and his thugs. Bringing back expatriates to rebuild the country is working in Afghanistan; it should be tried in Iraq. The returning émigrés will not be liked—East Germans don't like the *Wessis,* the citizens of West Germany, very much—but they are the only group that can foster a cultural and political transformation. In the months to come, we should judge the success or failure of an Arab democracy by the number of Iraqis who vote with their feet to return to their country to take important roles in reconstructing it as a peaceful, liberal, and democratic society.

BIRD'S EYE guest author Radek Sikorski is executive director of the New Atlantic Initiative at AEI, and former Polish deputy minister of defense.

Karl Zinsmeister will return to BIRD'S EYE in our next issue. He was in Kuwait and Iraq reporting our feature article (starting on page 18) while this issue of *The American Enterprise* was edited by Karina Rollins and Eli Lehrer.

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Sidelights

Anti-war protesters in La Habra, California destroyed flags, flowers and patriotic signs at a 9/11 memorial that residents had erected soon after the terrorist attacks. ··· In a piece in the *Guardian* on left-wing opposition to the war in Iraq, **Julie Birchill** observes that if "you really think it's better for more people to die over decades under a tyrannical regime than for fewer people to die during a brief attack by an outside power, you're really weird and nationalistic and not any sort of socialist that I recognize." In England, a program that encourages underage teenagers to experiment with oral sex is being funded by the nation's Departments of Health and Education. The program is intended to reduce promiscuity. 390,000 people listed their religion as "Jedi" on the British census. French professor **Francois Heisbourg** on how France views America: "The biblical references in politics, the division of the world between good and evil, these are things that we simply don't get." ··· **Andrew Sullivan** asks "If the French refuse to enforce a resolution they signed, why is that a sign of incompetence on the part of the Bush administration?" U2 singer **Bono** tells a British paper that "America has no experience with terrorism or even with war. In Europe, we know a little bit more about these things." Bono has been nominated for a 2003 Nobel Peace Prize. Eighty percent of Americans polled by Gallup said no entertainer would change their minds on political issues. Sixty-five percent of those polled said there have been times when a celebrity's position made them less likely to go see that person's work. Senator **John McCain** recently described Hollywood as "Washington for the simpleminded." Actor **Vince Vaughn** told *USA Today* that when he was in Europe, "one in three conversations wound up the same way, basically that 'America is the devil.' So I'd ask folks to think about the Marshall Plan a bit and get back to me." ··· The United Kingdom hopes to convene a special emergency summit to discuss anti-Americanism and its effects on the E.U. "We must not allow anti-Americanism in some of Europe's capitals to contaminate the construction of the European Union and its enlargement" read a statement from the United Kingdom's foreign office.

Porn publisher **Larry Flynt** has sent a "reporter" from his magazine *Hustler* to cover the war in Iraq.

"It turns out the only time I don't feel anxious about the world situation is when I'm eating dessert."

Blacks now account for nearly 5 percent of the estimated 1.7 million children who are homeschooled, according to the National Home Educators Research Institute. San Francisco mayor **Willie Brown** tells the *San Francisco Chronicle* that he has to assume anti-war protesters "are so misguided that they are actually aiding the enemy by doing what they are doing." Mayor Brown opposes the war in Iraq. Nearly 3 million fewer American tourists visited France in 2002, a drop of 18 percent compared to 2001. ··· Italian prime minister **Silvio Berlusconi** will propose this summer that Russia and Israel be made part of the European Union. In 2002, Italy lost over 32 million working hours due to labor strikes—the most since 1990.

An Iranian college student at Tehran University told the *Guardian* "It will be a good thing to have American troops in Iraq. Perhaps that will bring change to Iran..." The airport in Blountville, Tennessee is giving away free socks to passengers whose shoes are inspected by airport security. **Andrew Burnett**, who was sentenced to prison for killing a woman's dog in a fit of road rage, is suing her and the *San Jose Mercury News* for reporting the story. He claims being labeled a puppy killer has caused him mental pain and anguish. Reuters reports that in the war with Iraq, coalition forces have destroyed several GPS (Global Positioning System) jamming systems used by the Iraqis—one of them with a GPS weapon.

—BB

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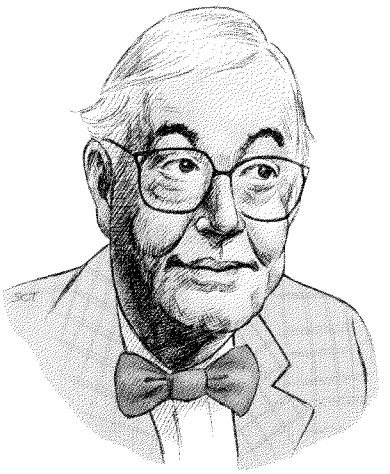

PAT MOYNIHAN, 1927-2003

We mourn the passing of Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, one of the great statesmen of our age, a fascinating and sometimes maddening man who combined the heart of a working-class regular with the head of a reformist intellectual.

Has there been a recent American politician as complex and contradictory as Pat Moynihan? He was Irish Catholic yet a foppish Anglophile. Certainly he was the only Harvard social scientist who could be greeted with backslapping beer-buying bonhomie in a Buffalo bar. The product of a broken home, Moynihan was courageous and far-sighted in analyzing the disastrous consequences of illegitimacy and the breakdown of the two-parent family.

A New Deal Democrat who seldom voted against a government appropriation, Moynihan was also a gimlet-eyed critic of the welfare state. He believed in international law, magnificent public architecture, and labor unions. He coined memorable phrases ("defining deviancy down") and delivered ramblingly learned speeches on recondite subjects while running shrewdly effective campaigns. Though he came of age in Hell's Kitchen (which Ed Koch waggishly amended to "Hell's Condominium"), he knew more about the history of rural Upstate New York than most natives. He wittily demanded sharp reductions in Senate staff even though he was a much better pork-barrel politician than the legend of the absent-minded professor would have you believe.

How dreary and conventional New York's current statewide politicos—Senators Hillary Clinton and Charles Schumer, Governor George Pataki—are beside Pat Moynihan. How colorless the U.S. Senate seems without him. Sure, he blustered, and yes, he compromised, but he was real, not the blow-dried product of a focus group. Pat Moynihan thought up his own ideas and signed his own name, as another independent New Yorker once said.

He is irreplaceable.

SAFETY CARDS

In March 2003 the FBI issued a worldwide alert for Adnan El Shukrijumah, who is sought for questioning in connection with possible terrorist threats against the United States. A major problem in apprehending him: He uses a variety of aliases and fake documents. The government's new terrorist watch list, airline passenger-screening network, and foreign student tracking system all face the same problems. No matter how well these networks function at tracking the right people, they are easy to fool with fake documents. The best solution is national I.D. cards.

Many Americans have long had a strong visceral reaction against required I.D. cards, which they associate with "domestic passports" used in the Soviet Union. The right to be let alone is widely associated with the notion that a person has a right to remain anonymous unless authorities can demonstrate a reason why they suspect the person committed a crime. But Americans increasingly recognize that one cannot fly, drive, go overseas, enter many public buildings, or even cash a check, without some form of identification. To say that I.D.s Americans use every day, like driver's licenses and social security cards, are voluntary is simply a joke.

Terrorists and criminals are also covered by the *de facto* requirement to have an I.D. The current problem is not that they have none, but that they have many. While most Americans have no reason to purchase false I.D.s, they are easy to obtain. (Under-age college kids, after all, have little trouble getting into bars that way.) Issuing I.D. cards that are resistant to fraud will do nothing to harm law-abiding Americans but will crimp the style of those who seek to break the law.

Terrorists will face the greatest inconvenience. Most of the 19 hijackers of 9/11 had multiple I.D.s, which they used to open bank accounts, take flying lessons, and buy airline tickets. The newly created Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services at the Department of Homeland Security has introduced a foreign student tracking system that will allow us to find out if a person who came to study in the U.S. is actually attending classes on a campus. But all this is useless unless it's possible to establish the identity of the person being traced. All too often, it isn't.

The I.D. cards won't only be useful against terrorists: Criminals on the lam

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will be unable to escape their past records and child-care centers can avoid hiring sex offenders. Better I.D.s would greatly curtail the high price of identity theft, which cost the public at least $750 million in 1997. They would also shave income tax fraud committed by those who file multiple tax returns (a savings of $1 billion per year) and welfare fraud (saving $10 billion per year). Indeed the public is wising up. As of February 2003, 64 percent of Americans favored the adoption of a national I.D. system for all U.S. citizens.

I.D. cards are becoming increasingly foolproof: biometric systems—which measure fingerprints, faces, or irises—can make it impossible for people to switch I.Ds.

We live in a new world. To live in it, we have to make some carefully measured adjustments to our way of life. To require all Americans to identify themselves in a reliable manner, as law-abiding Americans already do, is a reasonable and vital step in the right direction.

—**Amitai Etzioni**, *author of* The Limits of Privacy, *teaches at George Washington University.*

HOPE FOR CHECHNYA?

Chechnya: nearly a decade of terror, death, and misery, suffered and inflicted. Dealt with pitilessly by the Russians, 20 percent of their population killed, yet more displaced, agonized Chechens gained worldwide sympathy for their fight for independence (though not assistance), which continued even when Chechens resorted to questionable means of resistance. That sympathy came to an abrupt halt last year when Chechen terrorists took 700 people hostage in a Moscow theater, prepared, if deemed necessary, to kill and die themselves. Independence for the torn and wretched Chechnya seems the embodiment of a lost cause.

But maybe it doesn't have to be. Ilyas Akhmadov, the minister of foreign affairs of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, believes he has a solution. His plan? He's asking for *conditional* independence, ie., the Chechens will have some babysitters who will determine when and if their unruly charge is ready to go it alone. While Russian troops and government agencies will have to clear the field right away, Chechnya will remain under the watchful eye of an international administration that will oversee economic reconstruction, democratization, demilitarization of the Chechen civilians, sorely needed environmental cleanup, and a civilian police force to keep the bad elements in check. The designated international watchdog is—conservatives hold your noses—the United Nations. This way no party has to feel left out: The Russians have a permanent seat on the Security Council and will have their say, as will the "international community," and the terms of the trusteeship must, of course, also be acceptable to the Chechens.

Akhmadov's goal is to end such a transitional period with democratic elections held in a free and stable Chechnya. The foreign minister conceded in a recent visit to the American Enterprise Institute that his plan "may sound exotic," but firmly believes it's "possible."

Why should the world care specifically about Chechnya? Human misery abounds around the globe, after all. The Chechen Ministry of Foreign Affairs offers this explanation: "Resolving the Russian-Chechen conflict….[will expand] the zone of peace and security throughout Europe and Eurasia." Those who have little passion for such geopolitical concerns might be swayed by the argument made by repentant ex-Maoist Andre Glucksmann. The Frenchman points out that while "the suffering of the Chechens is much worse than that of the Palestinians, they have not turned themselves into human bombs." Terrorists currently are but a tiny minority in Chechnya. But, he warns, there is no guarantee that that won't change. As Akhmadov puts it: "The young generation, which knows nothing but war, whose only goal is killing Russian soldiers, and has no interest in politics," may very well turn into men and women who fight not for a legitimate cause of freedom, but to kill.

Akhmadov's plan has found support among American policy leaders. Chechens as well as Russians should remain hopeful that the plan will be implemented. As they say: Give peace a chance.

HEAVY DISAGREEMENT ON THE LEFT

In their new "Viva Las Veggies" campaign to promote vegetarianism, PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) argues against eating steaks and pork chops because they could make you fat. But another liberal lobby thinks PETA is unethical in attacking so-called people of size.

The spokeswoman for the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, Jeanette DePatie, was mad enough to give the PETA people a fat lip. "It's not acceptable. This promotes the idea that it is shameful to be fat," she delclared. "They are just preying on people's fears." The National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance "must summarily condemn PETA's insistent antagonism," which DePatie called "malevolent."

Attempting to defend a difference without much distinction, PETA spokeswoman Ingrid Newkirk insisted, "We're not against fat people. We are against fat." Then, climbing out of the fat and into the fire, Ms. Newkirk lashed out: "Obesity is a sign of a societal problem. We didn't used to be fat. Our children didn't waddle."

—**Tait Trussell** *watches America from Michigan.*

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"So let's go belly-up in a way we can all be proud of."

HOLLYWOOD COLD WARRIOR

Roy Brewer is still the toughest anti-communist in Hollywood. During the 1940s and '50s, he and Ronald Reagan worked together to stop the Communist Party insurgency in the film capital, Reagan from his posts at the Screen Actors Guild, and Brewer as the labor chief who ran the Hollywood office of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees. Today, at 93, Brewer still carries the banner, and is actively campaigning to set the record straight about what really happened during the so-called blacklist era.

"Mostly, we were staunch liberals and passionate champions of labor who became outraged at the way political activists masquerading as artists were trying to use the picture business for their narrow ideology," says Brewer, who started his career as a projectionist in Grand Island, Nebraska.

He can still remember when he first arrived in Los Angeles in 1945 to settle what appeared to be a jurisdictional labor dispute. Instead, Brewer discovered Party operatives wreaking havoc in Hollywood unions, forcing strikes, and trying their best to undermine the American Federation of Labor, which was staunchly anti-communist. The goal was to create their own all-powerful film industry union, a prospect Brewer and Reagan saw as disastrous to the business they loved. "I became aware of the power and dimension of the Communist apparatus," Brewer says. "I realized that the Party wasn't a ragtag group of wild radicals but was operated by talented, highly-trained individuals with amazing power to seduce and manipulate good people."

While Brewer and Reagan ultimately succeeded at keeping communists at bay, Brewer says the prevailing view in this town about those years often makes their victory seem dubious. Recently, at the height of Hollywood's campaign against the war in Iraq, the union representing screenwriters and even Reagan's old SAG warned the industry not to return to the days of the blacklist by refusing to hire those publicly critical of the Bush administration's war plan. But Brewer says it was the artists themselves, not studios and producers, who were to blame for jeopardizing their careers by choosing to take political stands the public abhorred. "Communism was bad for the box office," explains Brewer.

Brewer has recently aired his views on the op-ed pages of the *Los Angeles Times* and he can often be found holding court at the home of actress Jean Porter. Her late husband, famed director Edward Dmytryk, had been a member of the Communist Party and was rescued and rehabilitated by Brewer and Reagan when he finally broke from it in 1950. Several months ago, Brewer was filming a scene for a documentary in front of Musso Frank Grill, the oldest restaurant in Hollywood, across the street from the office where pickets marched against him in 1946.

He was outraged at a February Turner Classic Movies special on actor John Garfield that generated attention in the national press for alleging the liberal star of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* was hounded into his untimely death by anti-communists. Instead, says Brewer, it was the Communist Party that destroyed the lives and careers of promising stars such as Garfield and Frances Farmer. The voluminous documentation Brewer saved from that era seems to confirm it.

Riding out across Mulholland Drive, Brewer looks at the city where he once had as much sway as L.B. Mayer and Darryl Zanuck. The drama of those days is evident from the twinkle in his eye and the tone of his voice. Despite the odds against him, he remains optimistic. He can't wait to get back to the fight. "This time," says Brewer, "we've got them on the run."

DON'T MESS WITH J. C.

J. C. Adams was sitting in the rear office of the small grocery store he owns near Atlanta when he saw armed robbers on his video monitor. The Korean War veteran grabbed his 12-gauge shotgun with one hand, using his other hand to guide his walker (Adams is 74). After shuffling to the front of his store, he fired a single shot. It hit both suspects, killing one.

In the 25 years he has owned the store, Adams has been robbed dozens of times. Three years ago he was shot by a convicted armed robber and drug dealer just out of prison. Adams shot back and killed that criminal too.

After these attacks "your heart kind of drops," Adams told the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, "but you have to stand your ground." His message for those trying to

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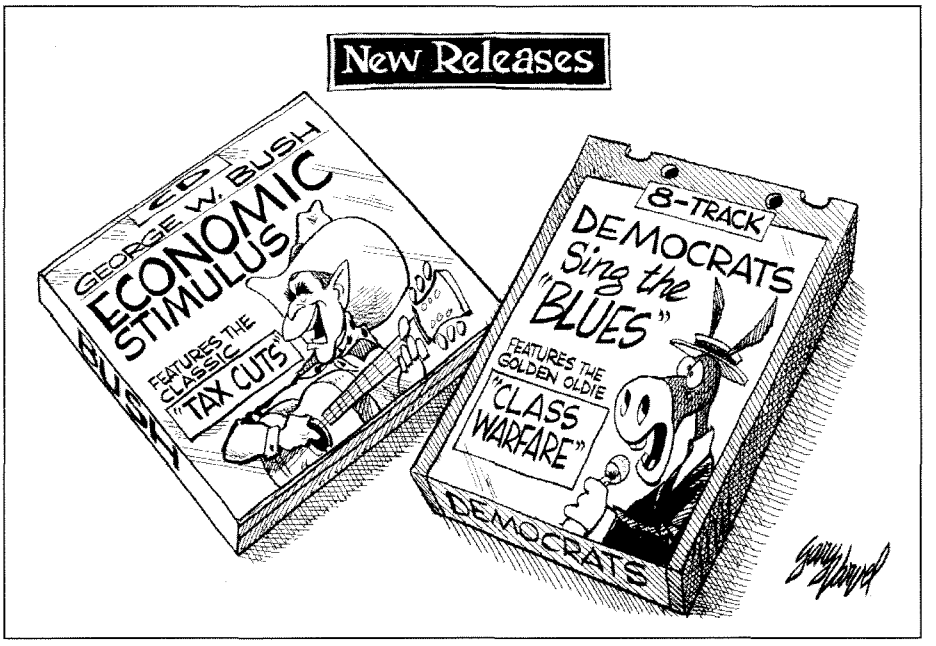

rob him: "Go to work and make your own money. Quit trying to take mine."

During another robbery, Adams' wife recounts, a man holding the store-owner at gunpoint demanded his money and his wedding ring. "The man kept saying 'hurry up, old man,' and I finally told him, 'If you don't stop calling me old, I'm going to kill you.'" When the robber finally ran from the store, Adams grabbed a pistol, followed him out, and fired a shot in the air. That caused the thief to drop his loot bag, and Adams retrieved his wedding ring.

"These guys think that because he's old, he's weak," said one friend. "You don't mess with him."

CRIMINALS WHO SUE

A Manhattan subway car ran over Seong Sil Kim on May 3, 2000. While she survived, her right hand did not, and she also endured skull fractures and facial lacerations. Kim sued the city of New York and won $9.9 million.

But don't cry for Seong Sil Kim. She didn't slip onto the tracks from some rickety platform, nor was she shoved into harm's way by punks. Police believe Kim was lying on the tracks attempting suicide.

Say hello to a few more litigants who broke the law, then sued over the consequences of their own behavior:

• Disturbed, Angelo Delgrande shot and wounded his parents and himself. He received surgery at a Westchester County, New York hospital. That night, he yanked the tubes and monitoring devices from his body, then leapt off the second story of an adjacent parking garage in a suicide bid. He is now paraplegic. Delgrande sued the hospital for failing to treat his depression and keep him indoors. Last October, he won $9 million.

• Neither a fence nor a lock could keep Ed O'Rourke from breaking into a Tampa Electric substation in 1996. Drunk, he climbed aboard a transformer that greeted him with 13,000 volts. In March 2000, he sued the power company, plus six bars and liquor stores where he bought booze.

• Snohomish County, Washington police caught Mincho Donchev breaking into mountain cabins while armed with knives and handguns. When this escaped murderer resisted arrest, a police dog mauled his foot, costing him two toes. He sued and scored $412,500 in February 2000.

• An Oakland, California bank robber was unaware the bag of cash he stole contained a time-delayed tear-gas canister. It went off and scorched him. He sued the bank and the cops for $2 million for his burns.

People who break the law, get hurt, then sue for huge jackpots are part of our runaway lawsuit culture. Shuttering this shabby corner of the litigation casino would be a fine way to launch the wider tort-reform revolution that America desperately needs.

—**Deroy Murdock** *is a senior fellow with the Atlas Economic Research Foundation.*

GOD HELP US

Vietnam veteran Patrick Cubbage was fired from his job as an honor guard at a New Jersey veterans cemetery for saying "God bless you and this family" at a burial service when he handed the folded U.S. flag to the widow. Two fellow honor guards had earlier complained about Cubbage's use of the blessing, and Ivan Dumas, the honor guard coordinator, ordered Cubbage to stop saying it in the future because it might offend Muslims or Jews. Dumas then handed Cubbage a copy of state regulations that prohibit "harassment or hostile environments" at work.

On October 31, Cubbage spoke to a member of the funeral procession who confirmed that the family would welcome the blessing. Cubbage spoke the innocuous words. And Dumas fired him that day.

Since then, state officials have offered Patrick Cubbage his job back—provided he never utters those hostile words again. He must also state that he violated federal policy. Then he has to reapply for his job as a rookie.

What's next? Impeachment of Presidents for ending their speeches with "God bless America"? People being sued for saying "God bless you" when someone sneezes?

WATCHING McCAIN-FEINGOLD

When "bipartisan campaign finance reform" was signed into law by President Bush, both backers and critics knew that

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only time would tell exactly what effects the changes in campaign law would have. Would the parties crumble without soft money? Would special interests get shut out of the system? Is political speech dead?

While it is still too early to give a definitive answer on any front, McCain-Feingold has certainly had an impact on Washington. The *Washington Post* reported that at a recent Republican Party meeting the usual lavish meals and gifts had been replaced by a modest breakfast of fruit and toast.

Although McCain-Feingold may trim a few waistlines, the jury is still out on whether it will accomplish its goal of trimming money from American politics. Even if the bill is able to take some of the soft money out of the coffers of political parties, it is unknown whether the money will leave the system or simply shift over to special interest groups.

Recently, the Association of Trial Lawyers of American (ATLA) began a program called "Friends of ATLA." The program allows "companies and individuals who are not eligible for ATLA membership" to contribute money to the group's cause of defeating tort reform. Perhaps other organizations will also create such programs to claim a share of any corporate money that can no longer go to the parties.

Of course, all this assumes that the new campaign finance law will hold up under Constitutional scrutiny. Groups ranging from the American Civil Liberties Union to the National Rifle Association have supported Senator Mitch McConnell's efforts to repeal the law. In the meantime, many advocacy groups and lobbyists are taking a "wait and see" approach to the law.

A representative of the National Federation of Independent Business commented that federal office holders are avoiding fundraisers unless they are explicitly hard-money events, in an effort to avoid violating what many see as the nebulous requirements of the McCain-Feingold law.

—**Alan Braun** *is a* TAE *intern.*

COLD COMFORT

The largely successful animal-rights campaign against wearing fur turns out to have had some unintended consequences. The livelihoods of thousands of Eskimos who depend on hunting have been badly damaged.

Deprived of their traditional ways of making a living, indigenous people are finding alternatives which may give opponents of the fur trade an even worse case of hives.

Residents of nine Cree Indian settlements, for instance, recently voted to authorize the Quebec provincial government to flood 115 square miles of their traditional hunting lands for hydroelectric development, in exchange for financial aid and greater autonomy. And natives of Canada's Northwest Territories are negotiating oil and gas leases to make up for their lost fur revenue. Environmentalits howl that this threatens the habitats of grizzly bear, musk ox, and caribou.

Maybe liberals should have just left the fur hunters alone.

—**David Schaefer** *is a professor at Holy Cross College.*

FINALLY: PRIZES FOR CONSERVATIVES

For over 20 years now, Chicago's MacArthur Foundation has given out its famous MacArthur Fellowships: $500,000, no-strings-attached grants intended to encourage interesting and creative work. With a very few exceptions —such as former AEI fellow Robert Woodson—the grants have gone to ivory tower academics (many of them doing important work) and left-leaning community activists. In March, Milwaukee's Bradley Foundation (which heavily supports AEI) announced its answer to the MacArthur Grants: $250,000 no-strings-attached Bradley Prizes for intellectual and civic achievement.

Bradley Foundation president Michael Grebe tells *TAE* that the prizes will go to individuals who have done work on civil society issues. Some will go to intellectuals—university professors and think tank fellows—while others will go to successful community activists. The foundation plans to give out the prizes at a public ceremony in Washington, D.C. later this year. The effort, however, will remain far smaller than MacArthur's: MacArthur gave out 24 prizes in 2002, Bradley will award no more than four.

A RADICAL FOR CAPITALISM

The Left is willfully blind to the enormous contributions that capitalism has made to democracy and individualism. Over the past two centuries capitalism has raised the standard of living and enhanced the health and life expectancy for untold millions in the West and elsewhere. It has stimulated new ideas and fostered free speech. When they call for the redistribution of wealth, Leftists are endorsing an authoritarian system that, wherever it has been tried, has resulted in economic stagnation and a sapping of cultural energy. Such concentration of power in the state creates its own tyrannical master class. Without the profit motive, few are inclined to work for long. The play of the market, rather than government engineering, is more reliable for long-term job creation. When jobs are varied and plentiful, ethnic and racial tensions diminish.

—**Camille Paglia** *writing in the* Times *of London.*

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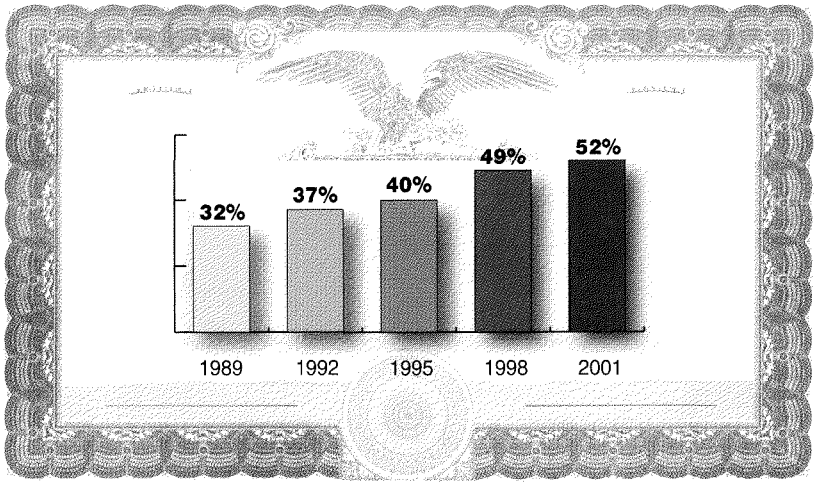
By Karl Zinsmeister and Eli Lehrer

Indicators

THE CAPITALIST MAJORITY

A new study confirms that, for the first time in our history, a majority of Americans owned stock as the millennium turned.



Source: Federal Reserve Board of Governors

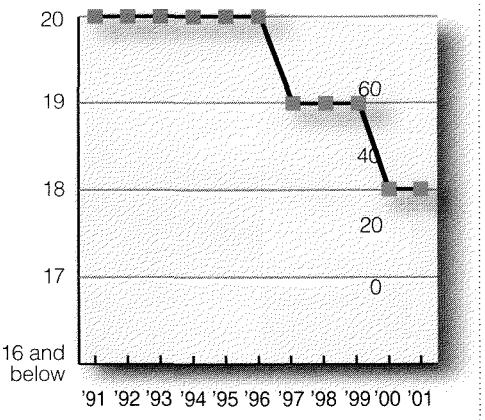
SAFER AND SAFER

Despite big jumps in highway miles traveled, as well as higher speed limits in many states, fatalities on America's highways declined significantly between 1991 and 2001.

In 1991, Americans traveled 2 trillion miles on highways and suffered 41,504 fatalities. That's a rate of 20 fatalities per billion miles traveled.

In 2001, Americans drove 2.3 trillion miles, and experienced 42,106 fatalities. That comes to 18 fatalities per billion miles—a 10 percent drop.

HIGHWAY DEATHS PER BILLION MILES DRIVEN



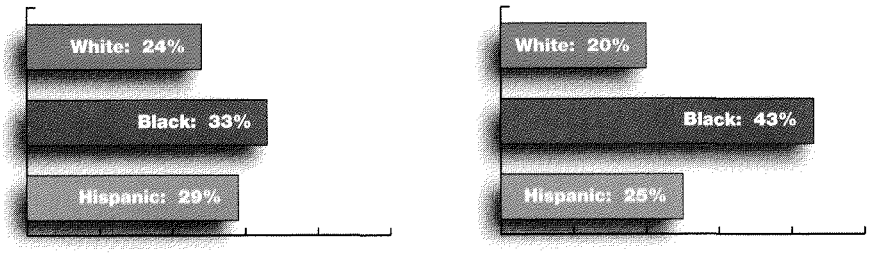
Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics, *TAE* research.

FED TO DEATH

America faces an obesity epidemic. About a quarter of the population weigh significantly more than experts say they should. The problem is particularly acute amongst minority groups and the poor. At the current rate of increase, within just a few years a majority of women will be obese.

AEI scholar Doug Besharov has argued that food support programs for the poor contribute to this epidemic. By assuming that the poor are starving (in fact, only about one half of 1 percent—mostly the mentally ill and drug addicts—face food problems) government programs contribute to obesity. The ethnic groups with the largest proportion of food stamp recipients also have the highest rates of obesity.

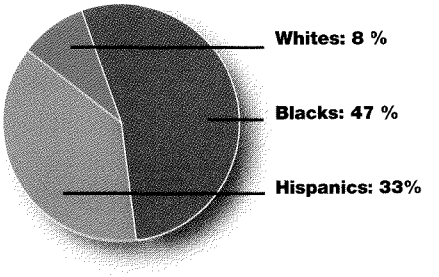
PERCENTAGE OF AMERICANS WHO ARE OBESE: 2001
(adjusted for age variations)



MEN WOMEN

Source: National Center for Health Statistics

FOOD STAMP RECIPIENTS



Sources: Department of Agriculture, Bureau of the Census

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Politico

Grover Norquist

French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin

The New Fifth Column

This column usually handicaps the ongoing struggle for political control in the United States between Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives. The short story is that the center-right coalition created by Ronald Reagan is winning and, barring unforeseen errors, will continue to build its strength.

But struggles for control also take place on a global scale. Since the collapse of the Soviet empire in the late 1980s, three possible rivals have emerged: China, the Islamic World, and the European Union. Of these, only Europe can serve as a true rival; the only force that can muster a fifth column within the borders of the United States.

China has a large population and a growing economy. Its Communist Party, which now includes capitalist business owners, wants to retain its monopoly on political power while largely giving markets free reign. China has vast ambitions, but its neighbors are India, Russia, and Japan. India and Russia have nuclear weapons, while Japan, which could easily build them, has an economy far larger than China's. Each country hates or fears China more than it does the U.S., and China has no exportable culture or political philosophy. The Soviet Union had Communist parties in every nation. Chinese-controlled political parties are not a factor in any important nation outside of China. It poses no real threat to the United States and will never become a true superpower.

Forces from the Muslim world have engineered one massive terrorist attack on the American homeland, and over the past 18 months the U.S. has fought two wars against them. Some view the entire Muslim world as a place where America might wage a 30- or 100-year "clash of civilizations." While there are a billion-plus Muslims in the world, no Muslim nation or coalition of nations could ever pose a military or economic threat to the United States. The radical corruption of Islam that motivates al-Qaeda has little support throughout the Muslim world. After all, few Muslims demonstrated when the U.S. moved against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Sporadic acts of terrorism may take place, but radical Islam does not threaten the existence of the American government.

It is Europe that represents the most likely challenge to American cultural, military, and economic dominance. Europeans, not Chinese or Muslims, expressed the most outrage at the American-led war with Iraq. The nations of the E.U., with the exceptions of Britain, Ireland, and, perhaps, Denmark, promise a welfare state of security, comfort, and superficial economic egalitarianism instead of America's freewheeling capitalism.

While the American Communist Party never exceeded 50,000 members, a European-style welfare state has significant support. Perhaps half to two thirds of the Democratic Party's base would trade away economic vitality, property rights, economic freedom, and a strong military to pay for a growing welfare state.

Europe also has a sizeable population, a GDP comparable to America's, the capacity, if not will, to wield military power, and a driving sense of envy and anger at being surpassed by the barbarians of the New World. This sense of envy has grown particularly strong in France. The French, like Americans, tend to believe that their culture is a universal one that everyone in the world should imitate. While American culture has a mass following around the globe (even in France itself), even former French colonies prefer American foods, movies, books, and ideas to those emanating from the Old Country.

But Europe faces a number of serious problems that will lead America to victory in the new battle of ideologies:

First, Europe has a shrinking population. Native-born citizens of nearly every E.U. nation reproduce fewer than the 2.1 children per woman needed to maintain population. While Arabs, Latinos, Africans, and Europeans can become Americans within one generation, many European countries have a hard time assimilating their immigrants. Second, the E.U.'s welfare state, high tax rates, tariff barriers, and restrictive labor laws weaken its ability to generate economic growth. Third, the E.U. continues to struggle with the difficulty of becoming one political unit.

America should further liberalize immigration laws so her population will grow faster; end the abuse of tort law; continue to cut marginal tax rates; abolish the death and capital gains taxes; and expand her free trade zone to encompass the entire world outside Europe. We can do all this, maintain defense spending at 2-3 percent of a rapidly expanding economic base, and, in time, relegate the European welfare state to the dustbin of history.

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"Live" with TAE

America's favorite authority on manners and personal conduct says our national vision of a more egalitarian society is influencing etiquette and behavior across the globe.

Judith Martin

Judith Martin, known as "Miss Manners" in her widely circulated writings on etiquette, is an updated successor to Emily Post and Amy Vanderbilt, a witty writer who applies panache, humor, and grace to her interpretations of cultural style and civility. Now 65, Martin was born and raised in the nation's capital, attended Wellesley College, and went to work for the Washington Post*—where she became a reporter, film and theater critic, and founding member of the paper's Style section. Her column is now syndicated to more than 200 newspapers. Martin's numerous books include* Basic Training, *guides to subjects like communicating and eating, and her new* Star-Spangled Manners. *Associate editor John Meroney and writer Patricia Beauchamp interviewed Miss Manners for* TAE.

The moral foundation to manners is that we ought to recognize the existence and rights of other people.

TAE: In 2002, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed legislation banning cigarette smoking in public places, including bars and restaurants. What do you make of that?

MARTIN: There used to be smoking rooms and smoking jackets so that non-smokers wouldn't have to smell the effects of smoke. Smokers had to ask non-smokers for permission to smoke in their presence. The greater burden should be on smokers because subjecting other people to the effects of one's pleasures is rude.

TAE: What, in your opinion, has caused today's intense level of discord between smokers and non-smokers?

MARTIN: When women started to smoke openly the old rules were cast aside and it became rather rudely accepted for smokers to smoke wherever they felt like it. You see, in the days of smoking jackets, smokers were referred to as "gentlemen" and non-smokers as "ladies." Gentlemen smoked in their smoking rooms or after the ladies had left the table. If one did wish to smoke in a lady's presence, he asked her permission with the understanding that the permission could easily and politely be denied.

TAE: Are you for or against anti-smoking laws?

MARTIN: I'm against them—but it's the only alternative when people refuse to abide by etiquette rules. Instead of the government of New York passing legislation, we're the ones who should be separating smokers from non-smokers. But people won't go along with it. Laws are being passed because people are refusing to be polite. We had fine rules in place but they were ignored.

TAE: So let's say that one wants to light up after a nice supper. How can one do that and remain polite?

MARTIN: If a person wants to smoke in front of a non-smoker, he should ask, "Do you mind if I smoke?" If the reply is negative, cheerfully accept it. But it also means that such a reply, or a request that an already lit cigarette be extinguished, be made politely. Rudeness is unacceptable, and it shouldn't be necessary to claim an allergy. One should only need to say, "I'm so sorry, but smoke bothers me."

TAE: Europeans have traditionally turned up their noses at American manners and culture. Is this still true?

MARTIN: Well, there's this sense among some Europeans that America has a crude culture and that we have no standard of manners. Many Europeans believe that our etiquette is a rough imitation of their standard. The English often think of Americans as failed Englishmen in manners and language. While American etiquette indeed has European roots, it also has a heritage

Illustration by Sam Torode

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from all over the world. As I state in my book, there are two major factors in American etiquette: the mixture of influences—because this is a nation of immigrants—and the revolutionary decision to condemn hierarchical distinctions.

TAE: American culture is often said to permeate the most remote corners of the globe. If that's true, how has our culture affected Europe?

MARTIN: European governments have become much more egalitarian than they once were. Citizens have a higher sense of how they ought to be treated. Also, American belief in the accomplishment of the individual has spread to Europe.

TAE: In America, even the richest of the rich, Bill Gates, Ted Turner, and Warren Buffett, for example, continue to work after they've made their fortunes.

MARTIN: Yes. Americans don't think very highly of those who don't do something useful even if they can afford a life of relaxation. The European ideal used to be to rise above having to work. It was the preferred lifestyle to go hunting, look after property, and pursue other leisure activities. That ideal has totally changed, largely because of America.

TAE: So America is exporting her manners?

MARTIN: For better and for worse, yes. American openness and friendliness is very much an influence now in Europe. Europeans have even embraced those unfortunate exaggerations of it, such as instant intimacy—the refusal to distinguish between old friends and new acquaintances in nomenclature. As a result, the distinction between the informal second person—"tu" in many countries—and the more formal one is being lost in European languages.

TAE: The French have a reputation for being rude to Americans. To them, we're uncouth. What kind of reception awaits the average American in France in 2003?

MARTIN: When I was in Paris a few years ago I was astonished at how polite and warm everyone was. Europeans love our movies, and they wear sweatshirts that bear the names of our colleges. But despite all that, there's still this view that we don't know how to behave. It has nothing to do with actual day-to-day contact with us; such views are based on a myth.

TAE: What does the Declaration of Independence, especially its line, "All men are created equal," have to do with manners?

Life is a drab affair if there's no sense of solemnity or festivity. People should comb their hair for family dinner so there's something special about that daily event.

MARTIN: "All men are created equal" is a revolutionary idea that inspired many to immigrate to this country. It meant that people who'd been living in a certain stratum of life, such as masters and servants, weren't destined to be there permanently. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about master-servant relationships in various countries, and he said the key factor in America is that both parties realize they might change places tomorrow.

TAE: So the equality championed by Thomas Jefferson and the other Founders has something to do with whether we're mannerly today?

MARTIN: Of course. When I started writing my newspaper column 25 years ago, people thought that etiquette was some kind of silly antiquated torture device used by people who had nothing better to do than humiliate others. The idea that in order to have a pleasant community we need some paralegal system that controls behavior has been many years in coming. The proposition that "all men are created equal" has helped us see that it's not acceptable to be a bigot or go around insulting large groups of people. However, when this country started, "all men are created equal" didn't mean all people. The Founders certainly didn't mean slaves and women. So we've been expanding that.

TAE: Do working-class people have worse manners than the upper class?

MARTIN: First of all, there is no upper class in America. A class system is something that one is born into and, no matter how he behaves, he's never getting out. In America, we have rich and poor and in between. We have economic classes, but we don't have a class system.

TAE: Well, are the rich more mannerly than the poor?

MARTIN: No. Money seems to have almost nothing to do with how people behave. There used to be a very high standard of behavior in this country, especially among the poor. People didn't claim they were something special because of their last names. They identified themselves as ladies and gentlemen because they behaved like them. What's more, children of the rich have always been brought up by the poor, and that's how they learned their manners. Manners in the South were influenced heavily by African customs.

TAE: The popular perception is that the South-

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ern tradition of manners and gentility comes from England.

MARTIN: There's a big English component, but it's not the only one. The dominant culture in what is called Southern charm or hospitality is African. Southerners thought they were copying English country gentlemen, but do English country gentlemen say, "Y'all come see us"? Southerners practiced African manners—that's how Southern graciousness developed. The South's open, easygoing style, its familial use of honorifics, and its hospitality are largely African in origin. The higher the Southern family pretensions, the more likely the children were to be receiving daily etiquette instruction from someone whose strict sense of the fitting came from her own cultural background—the house slave who occupied the position known as Mammy. Charles Dickens was among those who noticed that Southern ladies spoke like their black nurses.

TAE: New York, Washington, and Los Angeles are among the most influential cities in America, and they each have their own unique identities. Do you see notable differences in manners in these places?

MARTIN: Not really, because we've become too much of a mobile society. Every city I visit brags that it's the rudest in the world.

TAE: You were a drama and film critic for many years. Do you believe film and television have had a negative effect on American civility?

MARTIN: It's given excuses to people who ought to be teaching good manners but aren't. Parents and clergy often deplore the manners depicted on TV and they blame it for bad behavior in society. Well, for goodness' sake, TV is supposed to be entertainment. If it consisted only of people behaving themselves there wouldn't be anything to watch. The very people who should be setting good examples themselves are instead complaining about the entertainment industry or saying that athletes aren't great role models. Why do they feel it's Hollywood's job to civilize and set examples when they're not doing it themselves?

TAE: Where do you draw the line in terms of vulgarity and violence?

MARTIN: I think it's an industry question. I believe in freedom of speech.

TAE: When you reviewed movies for the *Washington Post*, you gave negative critiques to more than 30 films in a row. Were they really that bad?

Anti-smoking laws are being passed because people are refusing to be polite. We had fine informal rules, but they were being ignored.

MARTIN: I was watching two or three movies a day. That's a lot of movies. The expectation that there should be hundreds if not thousands of good movies coming out all the time is unrealistic. How many good paintings are painted in a year? How many good books are written? How many good symphonies are written? There were movies I liked, but the idea that we should be ceaselessly supplied with one good movie after another is just unrealistic.

TAE: You were at the *Post* during its heyday when Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein broke the Watergate scandal. Do you think it's a better paper now than it was then?

MARTIN: Without me? I have tremendous affection for the *Post* and see it through that light. It's like asking me to criticize a member of my family.

TAE: Is there a link between manners and morality?

MARTIN: Sure. Philosophers always considered behavior indicative of the great philosophical and moral questions. The connection between morality and manners is a bit like the one between law and etiquette: The law deals with what affects life, limb, and property; etiquette is supposed to deal with the less lethal aspects of behavior that interfere with the community good. The moral foundation to manners is that we ought to recognize the existence and rights of other people.

TAE: Several years ago, companies started the concept of "casual Friday," the one day of the week when employees don't have to wear suits. What do you think of it?

MARTIN: It's a silly idea. People dress as if for leisure but they still try to look as if they are in charge. It requires more effort, not less—which undermines the objective.

TAE: In your book, *Miss Manners' Guide for the Turn-of-the-Millennium*, you write on the subject of dress, "Total relaxation does not seem to inspire creative flirtation or wit." Are people who dress formally really more charming than those who opt for a more casual look?

MARTIN: No—they have more choices. Do people make more of an effort to be charming when they're dressed up? Often, yes.

TAE: Is there something wrong with dressing casually?

MARTIN: Look, life is a drab affair if there's no sense of solemnity or festivity to relieve the ordi-

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nary routine. People should comb their hair and wash up for family dinner so that there's something special about that daily event. What I have trouble with is people who try to sabotage formality. They think that dignity is pretentious. They love expensive wines and audio-visual entertainment but also love to denounce the trappings of formality as materialism. The reality is that formality is neither unfriendly nor pretentious. It's merely an alternate style, appropriate to dignified occasions.

TAE: You live and work in Washington. Who tend to be ruder, conservatives or liberals?

MARTIN: I've been looking at manners my whole life, and I can't say that political belief determines whether someone is rude or mannerly. People are ruder when they're in their cars. Politics isn't a factor.

TAE: Is it impolite to ask a stranger about his political views?

MARTIN: Yes. Washington is a company town and everyone talks politics all the time. People will volunteer to tell you about their political beliefs. But when it comes down to it, politics is a personal issue. There are worse personal questions that are being asked, but you're not supposed to look over someone's shoulder while he's voting.

TAE: Have Presidents been helped or hurt by their manners?

MARTIN: It's a difficult question; how do you behave as the highest person in the land where everyone is equal? George Washington was criticized for being too aloof. Thomas Jefferson was criticized for not being dignified enough. If the President shows a little distance, people will say, "Who does he think he is? He's got kingly ideas, doesn't he?" If he gets too chummy, people say, "Oh, for God's sake, this isn't someone we can look up to. He's no different from everybody else." Very few Presidents have achieved a balance between dignity and openness.

TAE: E-mail seems to have supplanted letters as the primary form of written communication. Are you concerned that highly unstructured and ungrammatical e-mail messages are now so common?

MARTIN: Look, e-mail is a very informal means of communication. It shouldn't be used for formal purposes. That it doesn't always consist of perfectly formed sentences does not alarm me.

TAE: Speaking of technological advances, is "call waiting" rude?

MARTIN: Absolutely. It presumes a policy of last come, first served, and that is against all the rules of polite precedence.

TAE: But what if there's an emergency?

MARTIN: Telephone companies will still break into a conversation in case of fire, crime, or medical emergency.

TAE: So you'd rather get a busy signal?

MARTIN: A busy signal is a quick, efficient, and free way of notifying people that one's line is busy. Why anyone would pay extra for the privilege of offending current callers while having to make this explanation himself, I can't imagine.

TAE: Cellular telephones are pervasive in American society, but as many people find them rude as find them useful. Does Miss Manners use a cellular phone?

MARTIN: Yes. It's not the technology itself that is polite or rude—it's the way you use it. I take my cell phone into public places, but I turn it off so it doesn't disturb anyone. It's a very useful thing. If you use it to make noise in a situation where you're not supposed to, then *you* are rude, not the cell phone.

TAE: Last year, there was considerable attention given to the decision by editors of the *New York Times* to publish notices of civil unions between homosexuals in its Weddings section. Do you agree with the paper's new policy?

MARTIN: I think one has to consider the purpose of these social announcements. It's to let people know who is a couple, or in the case of a death, who is the bereaved. If certain people are a social unit, then it's useful for anybody who deals with them to know. Publishing a social notice isn't the same as a legal or religious sanction.

TAE: How would you assess the success or failure of the feminist movement today?

MARTIN: All the problems with the feminist movement have affected men as well as women. I think that the largest problem is that the American job is designed for someone who has little or no personal responsibilities, be it household, children, community, social life or anything of that kind. It was designed for men—who didn't have these responsibilities because, in theory at least, they had wives to do this for them. I certainly don't want to go back to the old system, which classified people by sex and dictated how they lived their lives. But the workplace has never been redesigned, which makes it hard to keep our responsibilities to family, friends, philanthropy, and so forth. We've been using band-aid measures, such as day care, but we've never addressed the real problem—that you can't do two full-time jobs at the same time.

TAE: Could you name a situation where you would find it impossible to remain polite?

MARTIN: No, but I might define politeness differently than you. It doesn't mean going along with everything. People say to me, "Isn't it always a matter of making other people feel comfortable?" That's a big element, but if you were to start making racist remarks, the way I would make you feel comfortable is to indicate that I agreed with you. I'm not going to do that. I will certainly register my displeasure but I'm not going to say, "Blank you," or whatever the rude remark would be.

TAE: Are you generally optimistic or pessimistic about Americans becoming more etiquette conscious?

MARTIN: Well, if I weren't optimistic, perhaps foolishly so, I couldn't go on with this, could I? If I may say so, it took me almost 25 years, but I put America back onto the way of thinking that etiquette is important in our lives. You may not see it practiced everywhere, but people recognize it. I consider that a big achievement.

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Dust and Stars

An Iraq War Journal

Is Anything Worth War?

Miracles

MADISON COUNTY, NEW YORK, MARCH 1—In four days, I have just confirmed, I will depart for Iraq.

Amidst the immaculate winter frost of upstate New York—one day this week our digital thermometer announced 7.2 degrees below zero—my wife and I pluck some tickets off our calendar, gather up our children, and begin to drive. As we crunch down snowy streets, the tidy nineteenth-century homes of our village glide quietly by. Rounding Cazenovia Lake—now thickly iced, soon to sprout sails—we traverse rolling hillsides as beautiful as any between Ireland and Argentina. Even this time of year, the woods and pastures are thick with creatures; yesterday I saw a big tom turkey strutting across a frozen field in his odd birdish rhythm.

In 25 minutes we enter a Persian palace—our city's grandest theater of the vaudeville era, now glitteringly restored in gold leaf and crystal. Inside, America's sultans of jazz are holding court—New Orleans pianist Ellis Marsalis joined by his four sons: Branford on sax, Wynton behind a trumpet, Delfeayo playing trombone, and Jason at the drums. Father and sons tear into the set, pouring out an emotionally overwhelming mix of virtuosity, passion, precision, and familial love. Even as we settle into bed that evening, our bones and tendons are still vibrating.

The next night my wife and I journey through the same landscape to a very different destination. Entering a fine concert hall for

Karl Zinsmeister is editor in chief of The American Enterprise. *He reported this story from Kuwait and Iraq during the months of March and April 2003. It is dedicated to the tough, large-hearted men and women who make up the peerless military units of the United States of America, and to the memory of Michael Kelly, the truest journalist of his generation, who died in Iraq on April 3, 2003.*

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Written and photographed by Karl Zinsmeister

Stoking a Bonfire The paratroopers of Charlie Company, 2nd Battalion of the 325th Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, are addressed by company commander Adam Carson shortly before going into combat at Samawah, Iraq on April 4.

the latest date in our Syracuse Symphony series we are swept by a lush romantic wave. U.S. and European composers Korngold, Barber, and Strauss provide the program. The interpretation is by our orchestra's superb polyglot players—Americans with roots in Romania, Korea, Armenia, and many other lands, tightly joined under the baton of our Japanese conductor emeritus.

At intermission our delightful new friend the concertmaster comes to the edge of the stage to talk, and introduces the brother of one of his violin students. The 13-year-old marvel immediately engages me in political conversation far beyond his years. He is reading Tocqueville, prodigiously, on his own, and has just quoted one of the sage's many eerily prescient observations—about the "Mohammedan" religion's tendency toward violence. Only the dimming houselights can force an end to our chat. On the way to my seat another patron and I discuss recent late-game heroics by the Syracuse basketball team, our hometown gladiators.

Then Strauss's Alpine Symphony bursts forth so vividly I can see the mountain grasses ripple with wind behind my closed eyes, and feel the spray of the waterfall as the composer chronicles his day on a peak. A joyous Haydn oratorio sung by the local university chorale further punctuates the evening. Our gaze is lifted even higher, beyond the mountain top, all the way to the mover of mountains Himself.

Just another weekend in the 59th largest city in the United States of America—a remarkable land where freedom, beauty,

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and opportunity are available in wondrous abundance to all people, every single day.

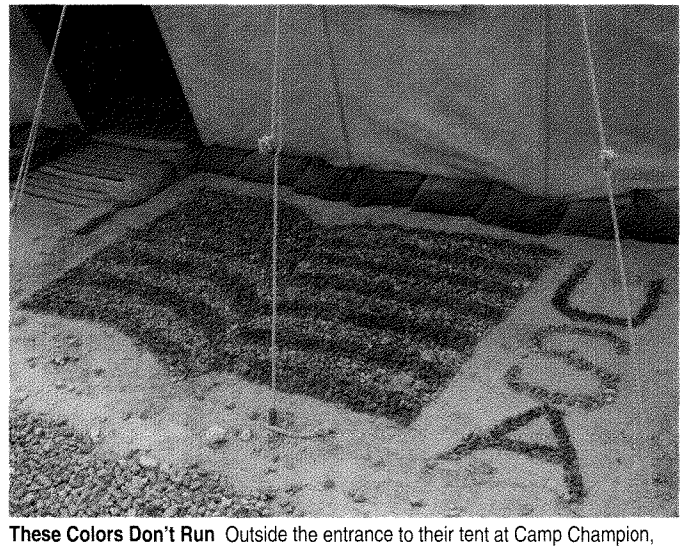
In the mad scramble to prepare myself, on just a few days notice from the Pentagon, for an indefinite-length assignment in an isolated and unprovisioned combat zone, I throw myself at the mercies of modern capitalism and technology. Internet commerce rapidly brings me two plane tickets, a shortwave radio, powerpacks for my computer, and vital memory cards and Lithium batteries for my digital camera. Internet sites provide the precise tunings that will make the radio useful in the Middle East, updates on local communicable diseases, and books and on-line archives that spell out innumerable essential details. A satellite modem is rented and Fed Exed to give me a communications link even in the most isolated corner of the forsaken land to which I am headed. Another editor acquires two marvelous "thumb drives"—plastic wands the size of my pinkie that can be plugged directly into a computer, loaded with hundreds of fresh photographs and thousands of words, then expressed back to Washington, weighing no more than a pencil.

Not only American capitalism but also American government comes through for me under pressure. The public health nurse for our rural county is a homey marvel of professionalism, surprising me with instant details, hot from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, on precisely which immunizations and malarial and bacterial therapies I will need to stay healthy in the deserts and mountains of the Middle East.

Four days later I walk into the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. to be inoculated against smallpox and anthrax, agents Saddam could employ as battle zone trumps. The attentive care of the military nurses and technicians, and the openness of the doctors from the Army and the National Institutes of Health about the risks and benefits of vaccination, leaves me impressed. As bureaucracies go, America's various governmental arms are more benign than any in history.

Back in middle America, I am able to leave my wife and three children alone for a month or two, confident that they will be protected, and not extorted, by the local police. Unlike in many other parts of the world I needn't worry that some competing tribe or religious sect will rampage through my home community in my absence. I can be comfortable that the town government will pipe my family pure water, and that our utility companies will keep our house warm and electrified in winter. I am certain that local and national businesses will make food, and insurance, and gasoline, and all of life's necessaries available to them. I can rely on numerous private companies to send them generally trustworthy newspapers, magazines, and radio and Internet reports on the conflict I'll be in the middle of.

Rather prosaic victories, you're thinking. Except of course they aren't. Literally most of the families on this planet *cannot* go to bed confident that these kinds of services and securities will be there when they awake. America's relative peace and abundance, her deep cultural richness, her competence, her fair play, are very much exceptions in human history.



These Colors Don't Run Outside the entrance to their tent at Camp Champion, some soldiers expressed their patriotism using colored rocks.

The pleasures and accomplishments and confident assumptions that fill my final days in the U.S. are minor miracles. We Americans must never take these things for granted, or falter in our determination to defend the economy and government and traditions of living that make them possible. As I think and then type this I am somewhere over the Black Sea, just hours shy of entering a land where none of this—not one single piece—can be counted on.

Costs

When navigating any airport today, one is sickened by the thought of how much time, motion, and energy must now be wasted simply to fend off the depradations of a tiny band of cruel maniacs. The hordes of new federal employees hired to x-ray, question, rummage, wand, and frisk. The enormous expenditures on explosive-sniffing machines and giant cargo scanners. The squandered time and opportunities represented by millions of travellers shuffling about in boredom, all across the country, when they would rather be doing something productive.

What mighty deeds could this army of workers and mountain of resources have accomplished if applied to some more fruitful task? It's a Kafkaesque waste.

I'm likewise struck by the high price we pay for political terror when I stare at the thick pile of papers that accompanied my biowarfare innoculations—adverse reaction warnings, indemnity forms, wound treatment instructions, on and on, all methodically researched and drawn up, then explained to me by six or seven different individuals. An Army doctor—a highly qualified colonel—spent about 40 minutes giving me the briefing that precedes emergency smallpox immunization. I kept thinking guiltily that he should really be doing something more important than clicking through a Power Point presentation for an audience of one.

Bright medical professionals in a great many places have

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recently invested vast amounts of time and money brushing up on prevention, discovery, and treatment of diseases that by rights should be obscure or erased entirely as human threats. Had these needless threats not been synthesized by vicious terrorists, those men and women could have been solving other knotty problems instead.

For that matter, what would I be doing this spring if *TAE*'s readers and the rest of the world were focused on something more constructive than war? Certainly not buying airplane tickets to Kuwait for the privilege of sleeping in the dust and eating MREs (military "Meals Ready to Eat" that one friend insists should really stand for "Meals Refused by Ethiopians").

What would President Bush and the U.S. Congress be focused on in this spring of 2003 absent the mad intemperance of men like Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and Saddam Hussein? Instead of pursuing progress on new frontiers, much of our national attention is now focused on, quite literally, damage control.

Certainly, our national economy wouldn't be entering its third year of funk had Osama bin Laden spent more time taking care of his wives and less time destroying other people's families. September 11 and the fear, uncertainty, and distraction that followed has taken a mighty whack out of U.S. financial vigor. Our powerful economic engine will eventually recover, but today's slumping indicators are much more than just scratches on a stock table; they are symbols of lost opportunities and narrowed horizons for almost every American household.

One personal example of how the black gash on New York City's skyline has fogged landscapes in other parts of America is the school budget in my own hometown. The Twin Towers collapse threw a heavy blanket over New York state's economy, with the result that our school and many others suddenly face large shortfalls in state revenue. This will likely be made up by sharply increasing the property taxes on my house and those of my neighbors. That's terrorism hitting close to home.

Executing war against our assailants is not cheap either. Figures from private and government agencies suggest that the costs of assembling our fighting force in the Middle East, conducting a month of combat in Iraq, and then bringing the force home again could easily total $40 billion or more. Occupying that nation may consume another $10 billion through the rest of the year.

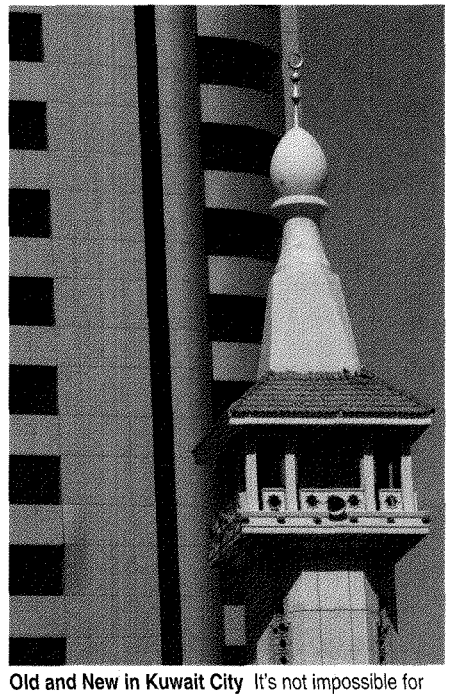
Of course the cruelest price of all for Middle Eastern terror is paid in human lives. Saddam is estimated to have killed 3 million Iraqis since coming to power in 1979, plus hundreds of thousands of Iranians, many Kuwaitis, and some Americans. How many of the soldiers that I befriend on this reporting tour will be injured or killed? How many innocent lives here and around the globe will be ruined or extinguished by future terrorist bombs, plagues, or knives drawn across throats?

There is no painless solution to the devilish costs imposed by the terror masters. But there is a solution: Kill the killers. Quickly. And completely. That's where my campmates the 82nd Airborne (and company) will come in. But first, meet some Kuwaitis.

From Kuwait to Berlin

KUWAIT CITY, MARCH 6—My first night in Kuwait, the wind began to howl through the downtown hotel towers with such shrieking force I opened the drapes at about midnight to watch. It was a scirocco, moving with enough force to not only make unearthly noise but also lift tons of fine sand from the vast expanses of desert that surround Kuwait City, and indeed the entire Persian Gulf. Think of a hard blizzard, but of dust rather than snow. Visibility declined to barely one meter at the storm's peak, forcing drivers to stop dead in the road.

The next morning I got my first daylight glimpse of the city through a thick brown-gray haze which took nearly a weekend to fully settle. I saw fences and metal roofs on industrial structures that had been ripped away by the winds. And I heard reports from the military public affairs officers that scores of tents had been knocked down at the American Army and Marine camps strung along the Iraq border.



Old and New in Kuwait City It's not impossible for Islamic nations to mix modernity with tradition, as Kuwait, Qatar, and other states show.

One soldier was stranded, disoriented, in the dust blizzard for three hours while trying to make his way from the mess tent to his sleeping tent. Some carry compasses with them during these short walks to avoid just such a situation. The sand berms that engineers have bulldozed to ring the camps are not just part of the security but also to prevent blinded servicemen from accidentally wandering into the desert during such storms, where they could become lost.

Kuwaitis have opened their doors wide for an American move against Iraq. The antipathy Kuwait feels for its immediate neighbor to the north is such that Iraq is not even listed in Kuwaiti phone books or time-zone guides or atlases—it has simply been erased as a respectable entity. People bitterly remember the looting and larceny—both petty and grand—committed by the Iraqi occupiers in 1990 and early '91. One businessowner I talked to described how soldiers cleaned out his entire building, stripping not only all of his merchandise but even the furniture and fittings of the office.

Today there is little or no evidence left in Kuwait of this trauma

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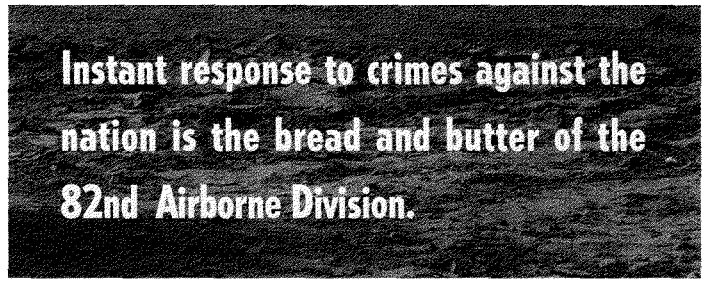
from a decade ago. The country ripples with prosperity and progress, and indeed effects a nearly American standard of living, not only in its central districts but also in outer neighborhoods where I visited supermarkets and teahouses and shopping malls. Many Kuwaitis speak English, and Western products and ideas are ubiquitous. Extensive new buildings glisten in many quarters.

This is not a Western nation, a true democracy (only about one seventh of the population can vote), or a fully capitalist economy (Kuwait's vast oil revenues paper over plenty of economic mistakes). But it is a peaceful and thriving place, where good newspapers are available, where there is no income tax, and where 60 percent of university students and 36 percent of the workforce is made up of women.



Kuwait, like most of the rest of the Persian Gulf states, is now a multicultural nation, where large numbers of imported Filipino, Indian, Sri Lankan, Indonesian, and other workers blend with native Arabs in a tawny skinned, black haired gumbo. Hardly an American-style melting pot (it will be a while before Kuwait has the equivalents of Henry Kissinger, Madeleine Albright, and Colin Powell representing it at international conclaves), but nonetheless a cosmopolitan society where al-Qaeda-style intolerance is simply not tenable on a mass basis.

Similar meldings of modernity and tradition are successfully underway in Qatar (which has a relatively progressive government that is enterprising, fair to women, tolerant of a mostly free press, and quite friendly to America), Dubai (which has made itself an economic success despite meager oil resources by opening itself to tourism and trade), and other Persian Gulf states. These provide encouraging hope that the Arab Middle East needn't be an economic desert and human rights swamp in the future.

Could Iraq, under American tutelage, and with renewed links to its gradually modernizing neighbors, follow a similar course? There is good reason to hope. First of all, it is not (like Afghanistan for instance) an ignorant society. Iraq was traditionally the intellectual center of the Arab world. This is the land of Hammurabi, the society that introduced the concept of zero into mathematics, the home of the singer of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Iraqis are described by experts as having an "unquenchable thirst for knowledge," and at one point boasted the highest rate of Ph.D. holders in the world. In the later 1970s, before Saddam Hussein seized power, the number of students in technical fields soared; great progress was made against disease; and the rights of women were established as nowhere else in the Arab world. Among the estimated 5 million Iraqis who are now political refugees and economic expatriates living abroad there is a great store of knowledge and experience. If they were to return, this could help jump-start their land into the family of decent nations.

Iraq certainly has a fighting chance. It retains much less of the medieval baggage that weighs down societies like Saudi Arabia and the Afghans. Nonetheless, remaking Iraq will not be simple, for this is a portion of the world without humane political traditions. It is sobering to note that the Iraqi government has been overthrown 23 times since 1920.

After making that an even two dozen, America will try to help the Iraqis put an end to their ugly political history. The U.S. has done it before—directly in places like Japan and Germany, and indirectly in places like Eastern Europe and Latin America, where decades of dogged effort finally shoved those societies away from dictatorship and toward representative free enterprise.

The fondest hope of any sensible American is that the remaking of Iraq will launch a kind of Berlin Wall syndrome in the long-accursed Middle East. A decade and a half ago, who could have guessed how rapidly other Iron Curtain nations would embrace freedom once it started to flicker in the heart of the Soviet bloc? Could a free and prosperous Iraq have an equally revolutionary effect on its neighbors?

Tyrants like Yasser Arafat and Syrian president Bashar Assad have already felt the winds blowing and made efforts to dodge and preempt the freedom spirit with cosmetic softenings. Iran is actively bubbling with a liberation spirit, and could well throw off its mullahs within a blink if an attractive model of modernity can be launched in Iraq. This is a grand and uncertain vision, but worth all effort. Redirecting the Middle East away from its self-immolating narrowness would be the accomplishment of a lifetime—and very possibly the difference between America's safety over the next two decades and a terrorist holocaust of truly historic dimensions.

Saddam's Gang

Bellicosity has been Saddam Hussein's trademark right from the start. His first prominent public act was to plot to kill his nation's leader at the time, Abdul Karim Qasim. Within a year of becoming president himself in 1979, Saddam had dragged his country into a war with Iran that lasted eight years and killed 435,000 people. During that period, the Iraqis used chemical weapons against soldiers and civilians on at least 40 different occasions. Two years after that disastrous adventure came to a close, Saddam invaded Kuwait, bringing more destruction, defeat, and death to his people.

Saddam's willingness to inflict suffering on his own nation apparently knows no bounds. While only around 3,000 Iraqi civilians were killed in Desert Storm (thanks to the care of American and allied military leaders), Saddam's brutality in quelling the internal uprisings that followed in 14 out of the

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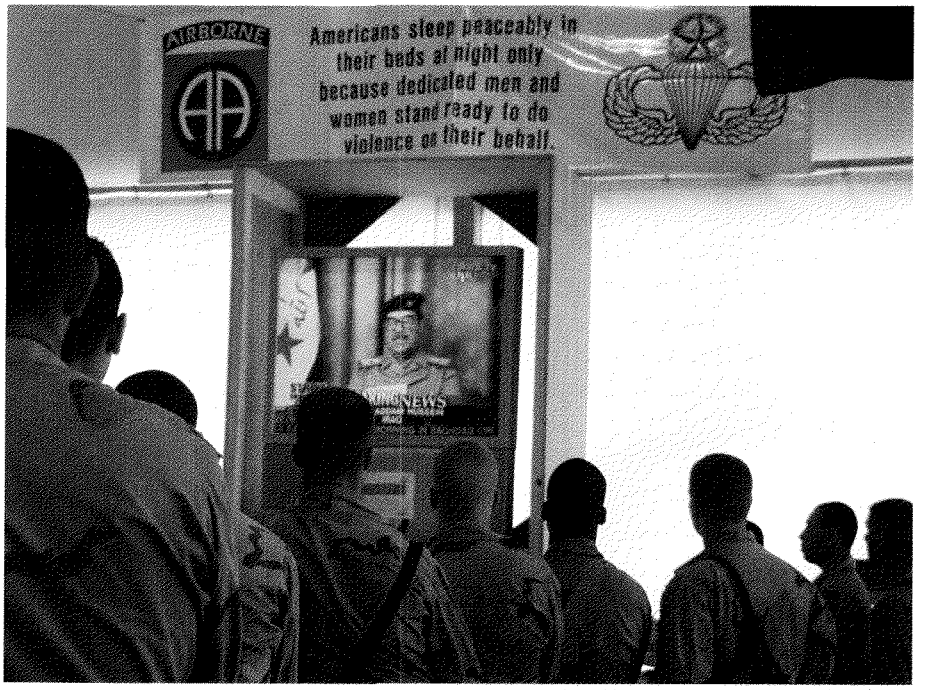
country's 18 governates (plus his neglect of basic health services) took fully 105,000 lives in the war's aftermath. When the U.S. and Britain proposed in 2001 to ease the life of everyday Iraqis by loosening sanctions on civilian goods in return for tighter controls on arms, Saddam dismissed the offer, further pauperizing his people to keep his grip on power.

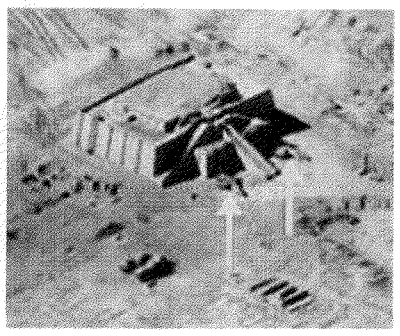
Today, incomes in Iraq have tumbled to a tenth or less of their levels two decades ago. A quarter of all school children no longer attend elementary school. Basic commodities like water have become so scarce that building lobbies are now sometimes mopped with fuel oil instead. (That is something Iraq will never run short of.)

In addition to the estimated 3 million Iraqi citizens he has killed, Saddam has driven 4-5 million people (about 15 percent of the population) into exile abroad. There are now about 80 different anti-Saddam parties operating throughout the Middle East, in London and other European capitals, and in the U.S. This man is an expert at making enemies.



Know Your Enemy In the mess tent at Camp Champion, troopers watch Saddam Hussein on Iraqi TV on March 20, the day after a cruise missile attack targeting Saddam and his sons kicked off the second Iraq war.

The misery Saddam has been so willing to inflict on his country ends, however, at his palace door. Saddam's personal wealth, all accumulated through state graft, is now reliably believed to total around $32 billion. On the day I write this, there are reports in the Kuwaiti papers that Saddam has just dispatched his personal jeweller to Thailand to buy millions of dollars worth of diamonds, presumably for Saddam to live off of should U.S. forces put him on the run.



Is Nothing Sacred? This Defense Department aerial photo from the first Gulf War shows two MiG-21s parked against the 4,000-year-old Ziggurat of Ur.

Quite literally nothing is sacred to Iraq's tyrant. A Defense Department briefing just before I left Washington presented photographs of ammunition dumps, anti-aircraft guns, and other military equipment recently relocated next to schools, hospitals, mosques, shopping centers, and other sensitive positions in an attempt to either play on American sympathy to prevent the war material from being destroyed, or else foment an international uproar if inadvertent damage is done in the course of bombing it.

Saddam is determined to repeat his successes of the first Gulf War, when he applied this technique notoriously. In one incident his forces sheared the dome off the Basra mosque and claimed it was done by an allied bomber, when in fact the nearest bomb craters were hundreds of yards away. Nearby is a famous 1991 aerial photograph of the Ziggurat of Ur (a 4,000-year-old religious pyramid located in the ancient city which produced the Biblical patiarch Abraham) with two MiG-21 jets parked almost touching its stonework. They were trucked there to be sheltered by U.S. unwillingness to desecrate the site, and indeed they were spared during the bombing.

Even more heinous is Saddam's predilection for using innocent humans to shield his forces. The most famous example of this in the last Iraq war was the al-Amiriya incident, where civilians were invited by the Iraqis to use as housing the first floor of a bunker whose lower levels sheltered a command-and-control center. Unaware of the civilian presence, U.S. warplanes destroyed the bunker, resulting in more than 100 deaths, an uproar in Europe, and a pullback in American attacks.

Encouraged by the mobilizations of the Western peace movement, Saddam and his henchmen hope to create more such "strategic incidents" this time around. The idea remains that media-viewer outrage might cause military planners to get cold feet and put an end to their raids. As part of this, the Iraqis welcomed some 200 anti-war activists from foreign countries into Iraq to serve as "human shields."

As hostilities approached, some of these shielders realized that their Iraqi sponsors were placing them around military and industrial facilities rather than the hospitals, schools, and other such locales they imagined they would occupy, and some hesitantly complained. Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Defense warned that by volunteering to serve Saddam Hussein, the shielders may have crossed the line between "noncombatant" and "combatant." Could this be a case of "Live by TV imagery, die by TV imagery"?

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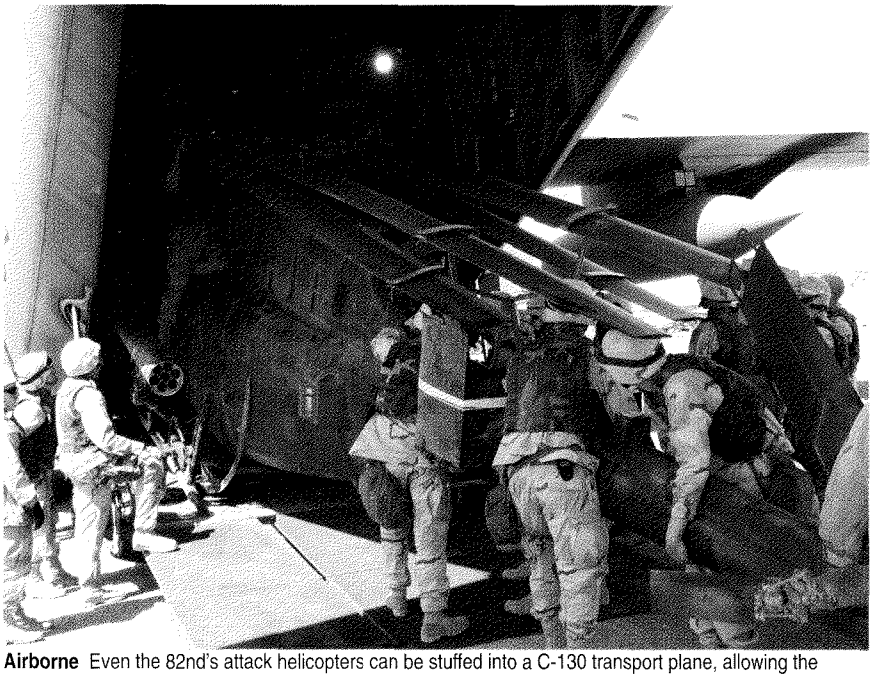
Battle Stations

Our National Swat Team

CAMP CHAMPION, KUWAIT, MARCH 12—Two or three hours after the Twin Towers collapsed, the 82nd Airborne Division rolled its equipment out onto the pavement down in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. "We thought we might be going somewhere. We were ready to move that day," says Captain Jose Reyes, a 30-year-old TexMex product of the ROTC program at U.T. Austin, and a proud partisan of his Lone Star State.

The 82nd is the only major military force in the country in a position to do that. Instant response to crimes against the nation is their bread and butter. There are Marine Expeditionary Forces trained and equipped to move rapidly, but not as fast as the 82nd can get infantry, artillery, vehicles, and armed helicopters into an airplane with its wheels up, headed anywhere on the globe.

Only about a third of the 82nd Airborne has come to the Persian Gulf. Another third are in Afghanistan right now, pursuing an expanded campaign against Taliban and al-Qaeda remnants along the Pakistani border. The final third of the division has just rotated back home to Fort Bragg after an earlier tour among the Afghans.



Airborne Even the 82nd's attack helicopters can be stuffed into a C-130 transport plane, allowing the division to descend anywhere on the globe within a day's notice.

The Army's other airborne division, the 101st, is also a light, transportable fighting force, but very different. They ride helicopters into battle—hundreds of Black Hawks, among others. That's fine if the division is already sitting within a few hundred miles of the hot zone. But flying wedges of helicopters can generally leap only 100 miles or so at a bound. Then they must land to refuel, let their security perimeter catch up, and regroup. So if you need to get thousands of infantrymen plus their associated artillery, helicopters, and fighting and engineering vehicles more than a few hundred miles from a base, and you don't have time to wait for snail's pace transport ships, or a tortoise-pace airlift, there is only one alternative: the 82nd.

Here's how they do it: For every two or three thousand fighting men you need on the ground, take 60-70 communications trucks, gun jeeps, ammunition trailers, and construction vehicles (including a dumptruck and a bulldozer for rebuilding a blasted airfield on the fly), and pack them on huge pallets with stacks of shock-absorbing cardboard inserted under key pressure points. Then within hours of any call from the President these soldiers and this gear will pile into C-130 or C-17 transports, and fly to wherever the bad guys live.

When the site to be seized comes into range, the backs of the planes will be opened and small pilot chutes will be thrown out. The tie-downs on the pallet-packed jeeps and bulldozers will be removed. Then the mini-chutes will be allowed to pull out large main parachutes. When these fill with air, it's good night Irene: The trucks are whipped out of the gaping transport with a teeth-rattling roar.

Within minutes, paratroopers follow the vehicles out the rear doors and into the darkness (troopers almost always jump and fight in pitch black now, where U.S. night vision technology gives them powerful advantages over adversaries). The soldiers come in carefully choreographed order—artillery teams placed near their howitzers, the engineers by their trucks, riflemen around the perimeter.

Each trooper will be strapped to a 25 pound parachute. He'll wear body armor and a ballistic helmet weighing perhaps 20 pounds. His weapon (rifle, machine gun, grenade launcher) will add another 20 pounds, and he'll have 45 pounds of ammo, food, water, night-vision gear and other equipment in his rucksack. As soon as they've landed and stowed their chutes, Task One for these men is to zap any bad guys and secure the drop zone—because Wave Two is already on the way.

Within a blink, more C-130s and C-17s begin to land within the perimeter protected by the first jumpers. All it takes, in a pinch, is 2-3,000 feet of firm dirt, grass, or hard sand, and the dance is on. The very first few birds disengorge an especially exotic cargo: armed Kiowa helicopters (two, wedged head to tail, per school-bus sized C-130 bay, or seven inside each C-17). If the landing zone is hot, each Kiowa's seven-man crew can have its fins reattached, its rotor blades locked, and the turbine winding with both pilots strapped into their seats within a half hour.

"Infantry guys feel much better as soon as we see them go up," one soldier told me. For the Kiowas serve as modern-day

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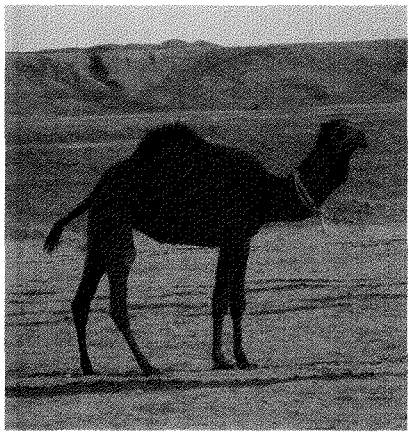
equivalents of horse cavalry: eyes up in the air to scout out threats (and send back voice and picture images of what lies over the horizon), plus a light weapons package sufficient to stop anything from two tanks (two Hellfire laser-guided missiles), to a mass of charging soldiers (seven 2.75-inch rockets and a .50 caliber machine gun).

The helicopters work closely in pairs or groups of four. I'm bunking with the First Battalion Kiowa pilots and crews. It's a smart, sharp, and close-knit group. They're known as the Wolfpack.

Camp Champion



Five weeks ago, what is now called Camp Champion was a sandy plot on the fringe of Kuwait International Airport. Today it's a tight little city of maybe 80 very large rented Bedouin tents connected by gravel paths, each capable of holding about 50 men or women (there are perhaps 100 women among the 3,320 soldiers now calling the camp home). Outside each tent is a Scud bunker—a long precast concrete arch layered with sandbags laboriously filled by soldiers under a mid-day sun. In the event the camp comes under attack, we'll all don our gas masks and dive under the four-foot tall shelters.

Security is tight. Stern M.P.s check IDs three times before allowing entry. Concrete barriers and concertina wire ring the acreage, and there are pillboxes at the corners and gates. Military secrecy forbids me or the other six reporters embedded with the 82nd from mentioning, or photographing, our Kuwait Airport location in stories we file during the lead-up to battle.

The territory occupied by the Signal Corps prickles with a forest of antennas. There is also a rudimentary sick tent, and a Morale, Welfare, and Recreation tent equipped with ping-pong, weight sets, and other distractions. There is a massive soft-walled mess hall where chow is served eight hours per day.

A canvas chapel is kept busy with services and Bible studies throughout each day. When the troops first arrived there was a surge of demand for baptisms. Chaplains built a hot-tub sized font out of sandbags, put in a plastic liner, and filled it with water for a goodly number of immersions. Some were first-timers, a chaplain told me; others were renewing their commitments.

The place is a bee hive of activity. Day and night, soldiers, pilots, and maintenance workers come and go through the tents as they rotate shifts. There is a constant rumble of trucks, forklifts, and six-wheeled gators. From very low overhead comes a continuous roar of airplanes and helicopters—mostly large military cargo planes ferrying in the mountain of supplies required to provision an army of a quarter-million men.

There is the lawnmowing buzz of the C-130's four giant propellers, the hushed swish of the intermediate sized and very high tech C-17, and the unearthly buzzing whistle that distinguishes the gigantic C-5 as it lumbers up into the heavens, a veritable giraffe-dodo-hippo of floating improbability. Layered on top of this are periodic thwack-thwack-thwacks from Chinook and Black Hawk helicopters, and the high streaking roars of supersonic fighters. Non-stop. I've always smilingly told my children to think of military jet noise as "the sound of freedom." Here it is that and also the sound of insomnia.

I have the run of the camp, and further tours reveal a polebarn popped up by the engineers (where vehicles get packed on pallets for airdrops), a good-sized lumberyard, rows and rows of steel shipping containers filled with almost every supply imaginable, all of this ferried about by a green herd of forklifts. Around the camp's perimeter, hundreds of vehicles are carefully staged in the order in which they'll roll into transport planes or convoys. Phalanxes of chemical porta-johns ring the fringes of the camp, equipped with dispensers of liquid hand sanitizer to keep dysentery down. A few modular buildings contain the post's only running water—a limited number of shaving sinks and some welcome warm showers.

Even in early spring the desert gets quite warm during the day, yet remains cold at night. The dust storms hit about once a week, filling every cranny of each tent, pack, sleeping bag, camera, computer, and body with a fine, lightly brown, distinctively dirt-scented grit. Lungs and nasal passages sting, wheeze, and swell. It's impossible to keep clean, but most of the soldiers bear up like, well, troopers.

The old-timers know it could be a lot worse. Back in 1991, when the 82nd Airborne rushed into the sands of Arabia to discourage Saddam Hussein from rolling his army beyond Kuwait and into the Saudi kingdom, the desert living conditions were miserable. There was no running water for months. No cooked food. Poor shelter. And no relief from brutal summer heat. I've overheard veterans of that deployment talk about going two or three months without a proper wash or hot meal.

This camp is vastly more humane than its predecessor of 12 years earlier. And one of the major reasons is the Army's new preference for private civilian contractors. Most of the non-military operations here in Camp Champion—rental and erection of the tents, operation of the mess facility, raw foodstuff purchases, maintenance of the showers and porta-johns, laundry, the PX shop, garbage pickup—are run by for-profit companies, because the Pentagon has discovered that letting the private sector handle these tasks not only saves money but also results in a higher quality service.

Even tasks like weapons training and personal security are being contracted out. The bodyguards the Defense Department hired to take over protection of Afghan president Hamid Karzai

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are civilian contractors (DynCorp), as are the specialists selected to train and equip the new Bosnian army (MPRI), and the people de-mining the Bagram air force base in Afghanistan (RONCO).

Leg Land

"I'd get my eardrums ripped if I walked around like these guys," observes one Airborne soldier, a personable Hispanic from California, as we stroll, on a postal errand, through an adjoining camp that houses regular Army and National Guard troops. Such camps are referred to (somewhat derisively) as "Leg Land," and such soldiers as "Legs," by the elite Airborne soldiers used to winging rather than walking their way into conflicts.

At Arifjan, another post I visit which is one of the Army's major logistical centers in Kuwait, the personnel are almost all supply-chain staffers and other non-fighters, part of the massive "tail" that follows the "tooth" portion of our military beast. The atmosphere here is comparatively lax. Soldiers wander about without their gas masks, in motley clothing, shirttails hanging. The word in the tents of Camp Champion is that 75 pregnant female soldiers have recently been pulled out of Arifjan. I don't try to confirm this, but it doesn't seem implausible for the locale. Pregnancy epidemics have indeed swept other corners of the American military where loose discipline and easy fraternization of the sexes have been allowed to root. The naval repair ship *USS Acadia* had a scandalous 36 female sailors return home pregnant during its seven month sea tour amidst the first Gulf War.

Among the airborne of Camp Champion, however, the uniforms are sharp, the bodies are hard, and the discipline is tight. "You have to volunteer twice to get here," they tell me, "once to join the Army and once to become a paratrooper." Here, officers are saluted on the street. A soldier doesn't step foot outside his tent without his rifle or machine gun slung over a shoulder, or without a complete uniform of battle fatigues. If he wanders any distance he'll definitely be wearing his body armor and ballistic helmet (the "Dome of Discipline," as it is known). No one goes anyplace without his gas mask. And leaving the area requires strapping a rucksack on your back holding a full NBC suit (15 pounds of protection from Nuclear/Biological/Chemical attack).

I get extensive training, like everyone else in camp, in techniques for surviving NBC warfare. It takes a few hours to learn how to don, clear, and seal a gas mask in 8 seconds, and quickly self-inject the three doses of atropine antidote that each of us carry at all times in case of a nerve agent gassing. We also carry a strong anti-convulsant to administer to buddies already on the ground. We've been trained how to decontaminate our exposed skin with charcoal powder, how to drink from a canteen with the special built-in hose, and how to carefully change out of one contaminated suit and slip on a new one.

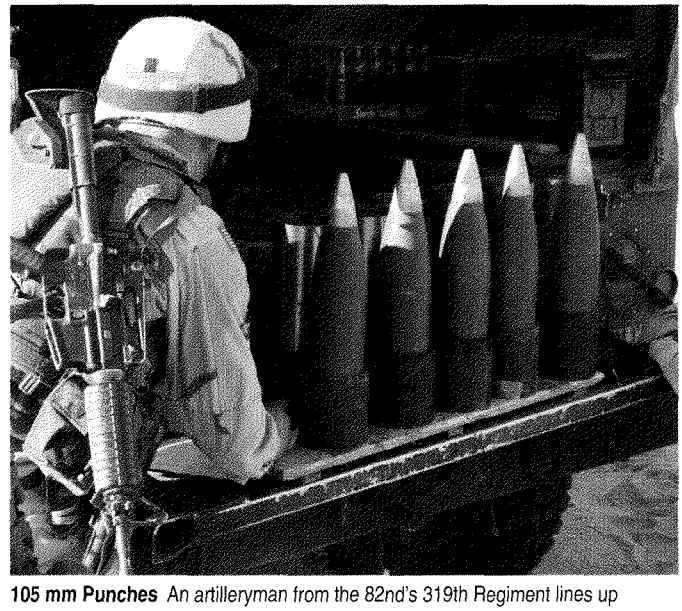
As the risk of chemical or biological attack increases, due to physical proximity or battle escalation, more and more gear must be piled on. First the coat and pants. Then the rubber boots and rubber gloves. Finally the gas mask and hood. It's definitely possible to fight in all this gear, but you'd better not be claustrophobic, and exposure to the hot sun is a brutal experience.

Practice Makes Perfect

MARCH 17—Today is the "expiration date" of President Bush's original warning to Saddam Hussein, and it's safe to say that the rank-and-file in Camp Champion are chomping at the bit to get the Iraqi strongman into either a new career or a fresh grave. "Soldiers, who do the fighting, are generally not enthusiasts for war. But our people are convinced they have an important job to do here, and they want at it," says strapping 6'6" Colonel Arnold Bray, who as commander of the 325th Regiment is "boss" to about 80 percent of the men and women here. When Colin Powell announced to the world this evening that the U.S. and its allies were withdrawing their resolution before the obstreperous U.N. Security Council, and that "the time for diplomacy has come to an end," riotous cheers rippled through the vast mess hall where soldiers of the 82nd packed in to watch the news on a big screen TV.

Of course it takes more than discipline, more than enthusiasm, more than ferocity to make an effective fighting force. There are countless technical and physical skills to be mastered, long mental checklists to run through, and the students are mostly young males with short attention spans. All day and night, throughout the camp and on firing ranges and airstrips way beyond its borders, there is teaching, practice, mentoring, and fanny whacking going on.

Infantry cross training on different weapons. A slideshow on identifying mines and booby traps. Lots of brushing-up on mortar fire. Endless repetitions jumping out of trucks and helicopters to set up security perimeters. Tutorials on how to shout



105 mm Punches An artilleryman from the 82nd's 319th Regiment lines up howitzer shells about to be fired.

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"Halt!" "Drop your weapons!" and "Who is in charge?" in reasonably accented Arabic. Supply masters carefully calculate plane loads and queue up vehicles. Practice flights in dust and at night for the helo pilots.

Plus dogged physical training of all sorts: Improvised weightlifting, running, calisthenics, chin-ups, teams of six pushing out-of-gear trucks up and down dirt paths. And regular review of the procedures necessary to avoid injury when jumping out of a perfectly good airplane with a heavy pack on one's back.

There are many reminders that today's high-tech warfare is not easy, not automatic, not something that just happens on a push-button basis (as the public occasionally seems to imagine). The process of speed-loading helicopters onto transport planes turns out to be, well, not so speedy on the day I observe it being practiced. Infantrymen arrayed across a parking lot in the prone rifle position are stacked up in a fashion that could lead to one soldier popping another in the back. When I visit an anti-aircraft battery responsible for keeping hostile planes and missiles away from the 82nd, they're having trouble reading the squawk boxes that are mounted on each friendly helicopter. Make a misidentification in battle and you could either launch a Stinger missile at a U.S. pilot or let a bad guy fly right into your lap.

I get up at 3 a.m. to accompany a howitzer team to the artillery range, where they test their ranging procedures and then lob some heavy 105 mm punches over the horizon in a series of gut-sucking thuds. The "six minute drill" intended to quickly prep the howitzer for firing features a little Keystone-cop bumping and fumbling, some erase-and-redraw over at the plotting table, and way too much delay to stop any charging horde. These are all glitches that need to be worked out through concentrated repetition.

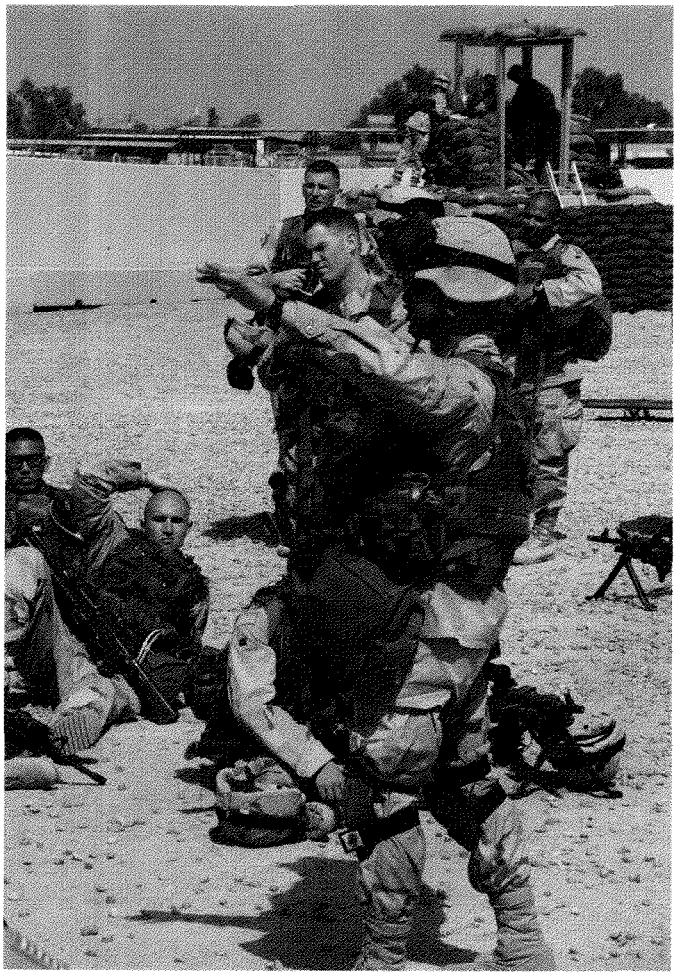
Teenage Burdens

MARCH 18—Today some teenage paratroopers from the division's 325th Regiment got a taste of life and death decision making.

Amidst intensified camp-wide training during the final countdown to action, these soldiers are run through full-dress scenarios, platoon by platoon, very like those they may face in real life within days. In one, a squad simulates a helicopter drop into a hot zone where a friendly humvee has just been attacked. Their mission is to secure a perimeter and then evacuate the wounded Americans.

All is proceeding well until a mob of "Iraqis"—actually other soldiers from the same company, wearing desert fatigues but no body armor or helmets—swarm out of an alley between some nearby tents. The role-players menace the U.S. soldiers, shouting taunts, and throwing a few rocks.

Suddenly one Iraqi in the middle of the pack unslings a rifle that had been hidden behind his shoulder, and attempts to fire. An alert infantryman drops him with a single round (in this case, a shouted "bang"). Unfortunately, the rest of the crowd doesn't flee when the shot rings out, reacting instead with rage. "You killed my brother," shout several of the hostiles, rushing the kneeling perimeter guards.



Prepping for Urban Warfare Platoons of the 325th infantry get training from an Army Ranger on how to handle riots and other civilian disturbances.

Chaos breaks out. Additional shots are fired. "You want more? Who wants more?" yells one adrenaline-filled U.S. soldier at his enemies. In the end, four foolish but unarmed civilians lay on the ground, dead.

At the end, all Charlie Company troopers gather around the experienced Rangers and Special Forces officers leading the exercise. "You're freaking going to jail," one interjects, forcefully pointing at the rescue squad. "You have to escalate force gradually. First you shout. Then you show your weapon. Then you shove. Only then do you shoot. You've got dead civilians without any lethal weapons on them. You've got a mess."

"There are going to be tragedies," emphasizes another. "But we've got to avoid atrocities."

The soldiers of the 82nd Airborne are highly disciplined. But there is plenty of room for consultation and debate. Immediately after the sergeants speak, a spirited (yet civil) group argument breaks out over whether the squad had any alternative.

"We're in a place where the enemy has just attacked a friendly vehicle and shot two of our guys. Now they're swarming us, and

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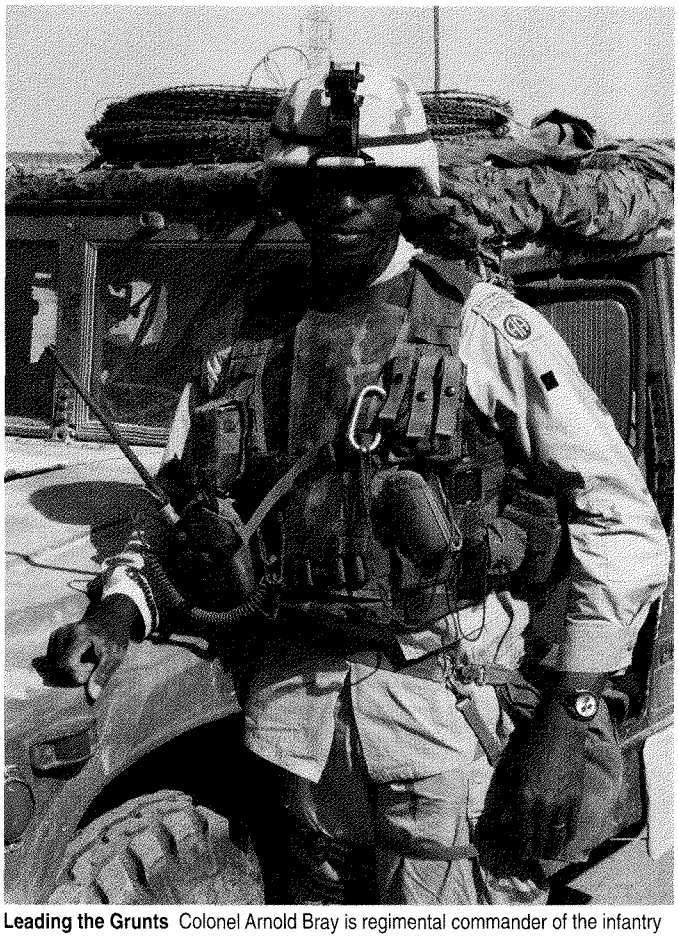

Leading the Grunts Colonel Arnold Bray is regimental commander of the infantry that the 82nd has brought to Iraq.

not halting when we tell them to stop, even with us hollering 'kif' [a tidbit of the phonetic Arabic that soldiers in Kuwait are being taught]. I'm sorry, but they're gonna get popped. And we're gonna be able to bring all of our guys home alive," the squad leader says with heat.

"First Sergeant," explains one private who pulled his trigger, "the guy touched my rifle. Which cost $500," he adds with a broad smile, no doubt parroting information loudly driven into his skull by some drill instructor.

"That's different. Under the Rules of Engagement your rifle is one of your 'sensitive items' and if someone grabs it you're justified in shooting."

The company breaks into smaller groups to further chew over the lessons of the morning's training, and the emphatic debates continue. Most of the infantrymen and squad leaders argue they must err on the side of keeping their men safe. "We're not just waxing people. That's wrong. But listen up: the rules have changed since September 11," a lieutenant suggests. "There are people out there willing to commit suicide. We can't let them near us."

One of the trainers tries to slow the train of sentiment. "Imagine you're at home, and soldiers shoot civilians. What are you gonna think then? Cops have to work through this all the time."

An immediate answer zips back: "Sir, civilians shouldn't be messing around with armed soldiers in an area where we got casualties."

These lightning-fast decisions would be difficult for even Solomon to deliberate all the way through. For teenaged men facing possible death in a hostile country, the choices are hellishly tough. In a scenario run immediately after the one I've just described, four GIs get shot because some non-uniformed Iraqi attackers weren't taken out quickly enough.

Invasion and occupation of Iraq is going to involve lots of raw military/civilian interaction. Defense intelligence shows that Saddam is secreting fighters and dangerous targets thick in the midst of innocent civilians even as we write. Sorting out the two populations is going to be hellish at times, and second-guessers in Europe and America will pounce on every hard case.

The encouraging news is, the men of the 82nd Airborne, and lots of other American fighters, are wrestling hard with these devilish choices. In sharp specifics, amidst rippling informed argument, they are trying to think their way through the snap decisions that can make the difference between justice and tragedy in wartime. Let's hope that when bullets start to fly the Americans back home appreciate the difficulty of their burden.

The Real Army

After weeks of close observation, where I have been granted everything from sensitive information in classified battle briefings to valuable insider tips on how to find a clean privy, I can testify that airborne generals and colonels are not standoffish conference-center commanders. Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Gehler, who commands the division's attack helicopter battalion, will himself be flying regular combat sorties into potential anti-aircraft fire. The infantry commander, Colonel Bray, is sure to be in the thick of battle; he's in a particularly aggressive frame of mind these days. The brigade battle briefings he runs are hard as ice, and each ends with all of the roughly 50 officers present jumping to their feet, then flinging themselves to the tent floor where they fly through 82 wide-spread pushups and 82 four-rep leg flutters. (As you might expect, 82 is a favorite number in this division.)

I run into Bray repeatedly during my days in Camp Champion, and the interactions are always interesting. Once around midnight I walk into the shower trailer, and who is there washing his socks in a bucket but the commander himself? As he twists laundry in his soapy bucket, and I shower and shave, we shoot the breeze about our kids, movies, college, and the like.

After brushing our teeth we step out into bright lunar light. While striding along, the colonel frets about the security of secret information, and explains to me why he would launch a "very personal, very harsh vendetta" against any journalist who releases advance intelligence that could endanger the lives of his men. The ghostly form of two paratroopers approaches us on the road. Suddenly the colonel stops them.

"What are your names?" Replies dart back. "Where are you from?" More replies. Outlines of individual lives begin to form. These are two human beings unlike any two others; somebody's son, someone's friend.

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Then Bray turns to me. "*They* are why I take this so seriously. Men, carry on."

It's not adequately appreciated among American elites how vast a range of individuals serve in our armed forces at present. There are hillbillies and kids from concrete canyons, wealthy suburbanites and first generation immigrants, people with graduate degrees and self-taught mechanical wizards. Consider just a few of the soldiers from the 82nd I've recently become acquainted with:

• A Russian who moved to Brooklyn at age 17, joined up, and now drives the brigade commander.

• A sergeant who was halfway through a Ph.D. in philosophy at Fordham when he decided he'd like to become a paratrooper. That was four years ago.

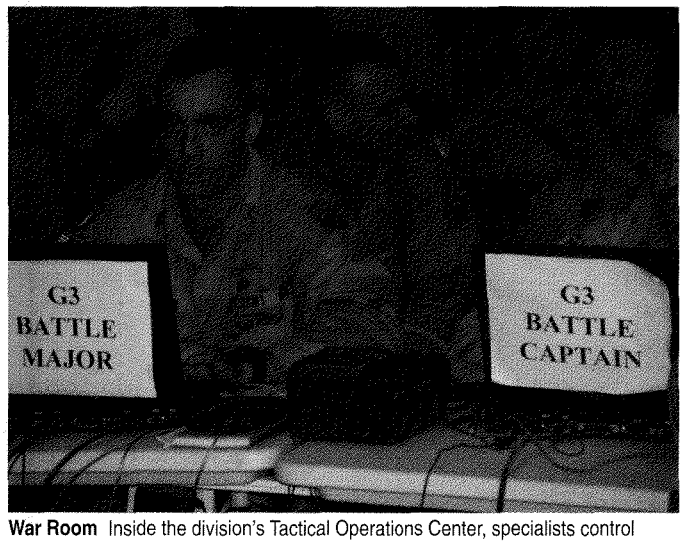
When Colin Powell announced "the time for diplomacy has come to an end," the mess hall rippled with riotous cheers.

• A warrant officer who, after breaking into fluent Spanish, explains that he served two years as a religious missionary in Bolivia.

• A bright, self-educated Californian who taught himself German, and is now about halfway through a rigorous Special Forces battlefield medicine course that will leave him qualified to do everything up to and including surgery.

• A chaplain originally from Kenya who grew up so destitute his greatest childhood treat was to sneak sugar from his mother's cupboard.

• A Long Islander whose grandmother is a veteran protester at the White House, and whose father was a draft dodger, who considered joining the Peace Corps but signed with the Army instead for financial reasons. He got sent to the Balkans, where he concluded that the military is now doing more good to change the world than any other agency of government. With the idea that if he was going to jump in he should do it right, he enrolled at West Point, and is now a lieutenant commanding cavalry.



War Room Inside the division's Tactical Operations Center, specialists control the battlefield.

• A pilot who started in the Army as a mechanic, took a tour as an artilleryman, was selected to fly helicopters, and now has turned himself into an expert on the art of coordinating airstrikes with ground troops, hoping to literally write the book on this subject for the Army.

• A military intelligence officer who, over the last few years, learned first Mandarin and then Arabic at a Defense Department language school.

• A lively young medic who turns out to be a graduate of Wesleyan, one of the toniest (and most anti-military) colleges in the country.

• A personable Colombian helicopter mechanic who left his home for the U.S. after guerillas in that South American nation marked anyone with military helicopter expertise for assassination.

Meshing persons with wildly different backgrounds, educations, personal tastes, and occupational talents is not easy, but the Army does a better job of bridging human gaps than any other large institution I've observed up close. There are far fewer barriers and castes than one finds at a typical civilian corporation, campus, or agency of government. And when this wide spectrum of men turn their minds and bodies to the same task, despotic enemies hardly stand a chance.

War Time

The Ides of March

MARCH 20—I'm now officially a beneficiary of missile defense. Early this morning, coalition forces got wind from the CIA of a conference of Iraqi leaders that was too tempting to miss. A round of cruise missiles was aimed at the meeting site, inaugurating the first day of America's second Iraq war.

It didn't take long for us to receive a response. About half past noon, the air raid sirens at Camp Champion began to wail. "Dynamite, Dynamite, Dynamite!" exclaimed the loudspeaker (the shorthand for "this is a real attack"), "Scuds inbound from southern Iraq." For a second, all of us in the tent stared at each other wondering if this was just a drill. Then we ripped the Velcro on our gas mask carriers, clapped our masks on, leapt for the bags containing our chemical protective suits, and darted for the Scud bunker.

It became very quiet as we jammed together under the sandbagged concrete culvert. The only sound was the ethereal hissing of the breathing respirators on our masks. Depending on where it's launched from, it would take somewhere between three and 13 minutes for a ballistic missile to reach us. As the minutes ticked by, the normal Army repartee of jokes, jive, and anti-

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Under Missile Attack This infrared photo was taken in the dark inside a Scud bunker during a night-time missile attack. Soldiers are wearing their gas masks and carrying chemical suits.

Saddam oaths began to return. "I hope somebody sandbagged one of the porta-johns," somebody cracked.

Then the loudspeaker began to rumble again. Clearly the announcer was wearing his own gas mask. Through the muffling, however, came his quite intelligible and welcome announcement: "Missile destroyed." Some soldiers told me they heard the explosion of the Patriot thudding on the horizon. Just one hour later, the first attack was repeated in almost every particular. Once again a gratifying verdict eventually echoed over the loudspeakers: "Missile destroyed."

The Patriot system that knocked down these two missiles has been harshly attacked by defense critics for years; more generally, skeptics have savaged the entire concept of missile defense, sneering that the prospect of hitting one missile with another missile is a pipe dream. Well, those of us who spent mid March in the Kuwaiti desert are here to tell you ballistic missile defense works. If one of Saddam's Scuds had landed on a U.S. camp, where military personnel are densely packed in open tents, he could have achieved a Beirut Bombing or Khobar Towers-style killing.

Certainly U.S. soldiers think highly of the Patriots. They've learned to trust and love the protective umbrella that the U.S. military now stretches over critical military arenas and nearby cities. "We're gonna have to take those Patriot boys out on the town when we get home," suggested one trooper, with smiling nods all around. Over the next days, our anti-missile batteries were a perfect ten-for-ten in blocking threats headed for U.S. military camps or residential areas in Kuwait.

Inexplicably, media reports failed to properly mark this day as a ringing vindication of missile defense. The establishment media also elided over another fundamental lesson of this skirmish: intermediate-range ballistic missiles are one of the weapons Saddam Hussein was banned from possessing years ago by U.N. resolution. They are one of the weapons that, just weeks ago, he swore on a stack of Holy Korans he didn't possess. They are one of the weapons U.N. inspectors told us they saw no sign of. They are one of the weapons that Security Council opponents of the U.S. sniffed that Iraq was now unlikely to possess.

So: On the very first day of hostilities, Saddam revealed himself (once again) to be a liar. Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schroeder, Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan, and other apologists for the U.N. inspection charade were shown to be feckless fools. And American anti-ballistic missile technology was demonstrated to be a defensive bulwark of our future.

Battle Ready

In the Army, sergeants major are the bosses of the factory floor. They are the bridge between enlisted soldiers and commanding officers. And they guide and manage other sergeants—who are the real backbone and institutional memory of the military.

Paul Weidhas—the bluff, sometimes stern, yet kind and good humored sergeant major of my mates in the helicopter battalion stops by my cot. Have I got ballistic armor? With supplemental Kevlar hard plates? Let me see your helmet. Got the special canteen that fits with the drinking straw sealed into your gas mask? You need to sew squares of glint tape on your sleeves, your back, and your helmet cover so our soldiers and pilots see you glow in their night sights, recognize you as a friendly, and hold their fire. Do you know your blood type? Write it on your t-shirt. Does somebody have a DNA sample for you? We'll need it if a body part has to be identified.

Meanwhile, Jake Froehle, the strapping 27-year-old helicopter pilot and father of two from Alaska who is Headquarters company commander, is completing the kind of paperwork that only military officers process: Each of his troopers must fill out a form providing some weirdly intimate personal information that would be used if it became necessary to positively confirm the identity of a shot-down pilot, captured soldier, unknown radio caller, or in some other situation where impersonation is a risk. The written statements are quirky declarations on things like what kind of hair your wife has, or which sibling is your favorite, or some food preference or detail of home life or per-

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sonal friendship. Jake chuckles perversely, and anonymously shares a few odd details aloud, as he reviews the forms for completeness from his corner of the tent.

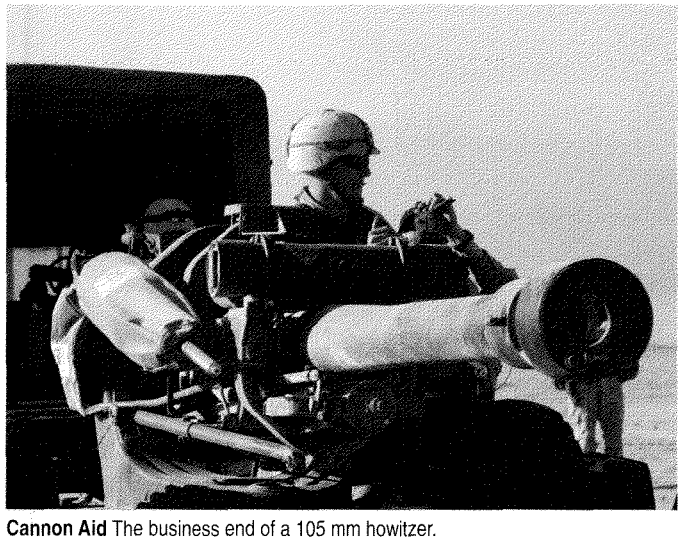
All around me the soldiers are getting down to business: Cleaning M-4 carbines and other weapons. Testing radios. Sifting through what should be included in the main battle pack, versus what will go into a second pack which can be abandoned if the soldier gets into deep trouble. I must pack the same way. Among the infantry, physical drills have gotten harder, a little savage even.

Those of us who spent mid March in the Kuwaiti desert are here to tell you that ballistic missile defense works.

Throughout the camp, a definite ferocity is building. These troopers don't want to be left behind as the combat operation builds; they desperately want to carry out the part they've trained so hard for. The missile launches, the odious demands of constant chemical and ballistic protection, the trickling casualty reports, the obnoxious rhetoric continuing to flow from Baghdad, have left them testy and itchy for action.

The rhetoric from second-guessers in Europe has also annoyed some. I was in the mess hall when a report aired over the camp TV that French president Jacques Chirac was "warning" the U.S. and Britain against trying to rebuild Iraq without French help. "I'd like to know why France thinks it should have anything at all to say about it," scoffed a sergeant sitting across from me. (Except he said it in French himself—that peculiar English form of French that is spoken by salty paratroopers.)

The brass are nearly as keyed up as the rank-and-file, but they are proceeding with great patience. They understand the stunning level of destruction their forces could inflict if fully unleashed, and realizing that America will need to fix most of the physical infrastructure it destroys in this war, they are showing great reserve. Force is being ratcheted up only gradually, in hopes that a coup, the death of Saddam, or some other early capitulation by the enemy might spare everyone much unnecessary damage. We are getting lots of military intelligence reporting infighting (even gun battles) within the Iraqi forces, as they hash out their next move.



Cannon Aid The business end of a 105 mm howitzer.

A good deal of planning and training is going on in camp to prepare our forces to win the peace after the battles end. Civil affairs, intelligence, M.P., and psychological-operations units are working at crowd control, quick identification of local leaders, aid distribution, and loudspeaker broadcasting in Arabic.

Meanwhile, life goes on. Yesterday was Sunday, and quite possibly the last chapel services before these soldiers go into combat, most of them for the first time. A large tent packed with burly, heavily armed men bowing deep in prayer, reading from their camouflaged Bibles, and singing out in full-throat is quite a sight. The preachers emphasized the importance of individuals getting right with God, and scripture's many positive references to loyal soldiering in the cause of good.

A number of first-time fathers stood up to announce the birth of their babies this week, reminding us what these men give up to be here. During prayer call at the Protestant services there were requests from sergeants and officers for wisdom so that they might ably lead the soldiers under them. I was struck that several requests for prayers for Iraqis were offered up by servicemen in the congregation—prayers for the safety of Iraqi civilians, and even for Iraqi soldiers, that they might recognize U.S. troops as "liberators not enemies," and not throw their lives away.

This camp is full of that characteristically American combination of no-nonsense ferocity hard amidst deep decency and kindness. The noblest, and rarest, mix for any military setting.

Tech vs. The Fog of War

The early sprint through southern Iraq by U.S. Marines and the Army's 3rd Infantry Division was a welcome kickoff to the war. Relatively few lives were lost, and the key southern oilfields and ports were secured mostly undamaged. The speed of the southern rollup was no great surprise, however. Iraq's south has long been a kind of rebel province due to religious and cultural schisms separating it from Baghdad.

Days and even weeks before any hostilities commenced, certain Iraqi troops and border guards were trying to surrender to U.S. troops across the Kuwaiti fence. Noting that no war was yet underway, the Americans sent them back. "I guess we can think of these guys as pre-positioned POWs" stated one military intelligence officer with a straight face at a nightly pre-war battle briefing.

The 82nd's commander, General Swannack, has granted the embedded journalists unusual access to his councils of war. I've attended a number of Battle Update Briefs (BUBs) at the division, brigade, and battallion levels. These are the central daily events for

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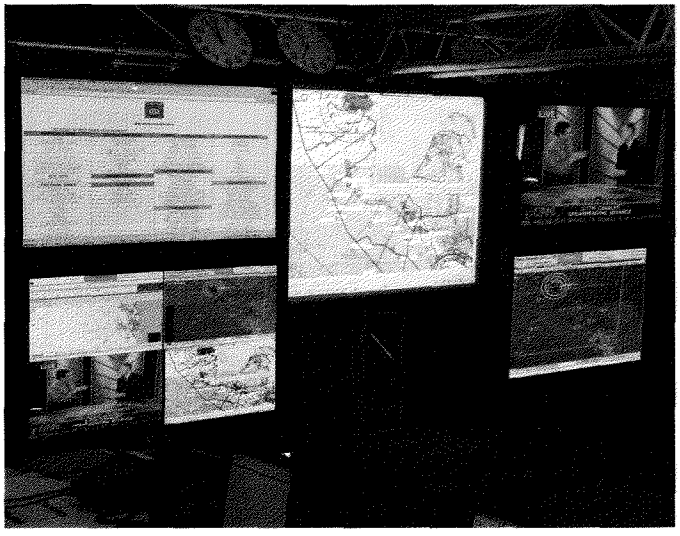

High Tech Battle Center Inside the 82nd's Tactical Operations Center, the new digital battle screens present a range of secret and public information. They can be broken down and reinstalled on a new battlefield in a day.

sharing intelligence and planning missions, and have always previously been closed to any but officers with secret clearances. I'm told that only a handful of journalists in the war theater were accorded this privilege during the combat planning phases.

To give us a sense of how a battle is controlled, Karl Horst, the bright, personable, thick-necked, multilingual colonel who is the division chief of staff (making him General Swannack's top assistant here) gives me and four or five other reporters a tour of their new Digital Command Center. Two years ago, battles were still run using paper maps, pins, stickie-notes, and overhead projectors. Today, a complex of up to 17 separate computer information screens is projected on a large wall, under three clocks set to relevant time zones, surrounded by rings of tables crowned with laptops where perhaps 50 officers monitor individual components of communication and data.

The main battle screen is a map, upon which critical boundaries are imposed—artillery ranges, air defense zones, political limits. A brand new Northrop Grumman system known as "Blue Force Tracker" allows commanders to see the true, exact location of all friendly forces with no delay from lagging radio or courier reports. Vehicles of all sorts—trucks, tanks, ships, airplanes—have been fitted with transceivers that constantly send their GPS coordinates back to headquarters. Intelligence reports on enemy positions are layered on top of this to create a composite battle map.

Soldiers in the field can also send back information on minefield locations, downed bridges, chemically contaminated areas, and such. These get entered onto the central battlefield map, which is in turn shared digitally by all units. The system will even automatically set off an alarm in a vehicle whenever it wanders dangerously close to an enemy position, mines, or some other hazard the field commander might not have noticed.

Both HQ and individual units out in the field can thus easily monitor the relative positions of friendly armor, artillery, and supply units, the progress of ships carrying critical supplies, the nearness of the enemy, and the like. A similar screen portrays the exact location, type, and direction of all aircraft in the sky. (Good guys show up as green, bad planes are red.) Someday it will become practical to extend elements of this tracking system right down to the level of the individual soldier. Live or taped video feeds from helicopters, Predator drones, or surveillance planes can also be fed onto the battle center screens.

None of this is foolproof. Friendly fire accidents and the like will never be completely eliminated from the battlefield. But great progress has been made.

One panel in the battle center is an index page for the division's Web site, which is where all information is now disseminated. Until quite recently, any sensitive new order used to be typed, photocopied, then dispatched by courier to as many as 50 different sub-command nodes. Today, new orders are simply posted on SIPRNET, the encrypted military intranet, where all commanders can have instant access to them, as well as voluminous archived background information.

The interestingly named Major Miner, who has put much of this hardware together, reports that the system is made to be broken down and rebuilt quickly. Within eight hours of when the first parachute pops in an airborne assault, this entire command center can be set up afresh in the middle of the battlefield. With its own power, and coded satellite links to the entire globe, commanders will be able to see and assess almost any aspect of their fight, as well as the larger war.

"I want you to go out and look your paratroopers in the eye," stated General Swannack as he closed one Division BUB. "I want you to make sure they're ready. Because this fight, like all fights, will ultimately be won by our infantrymen and sergeants." Which is certainly true.

But today more than ever before, the men moving the chess pieces inside the battle centers can also make a tide turn. They now have current, accurate information that can make all the difference between success and failure, life and death. The fog of war will never be blown away altogether; but it's thinning.

Pressure Builds, Then Breaks

Some advance elements of the 82nd Airborne, mostly supply units, have already trickled north into Iraq, following the armored elements that plowed open the road. Out in our camp's staging area, almost all of the division's vehicles are now fully loaded, their tarps pulled tight. The frantic calculations of the loadmasters responsible for fitting into a limited number of airplanes everything the assault force will need to fight a battle for several days are nearly finished. We're ticking close to our d-day.

I ask Captain Andy Reiter, a pleasant 27-year-old Kiowa pilot who grew up solid in a Wyoming mining town, then went to West Point, how he feels about the prospect of flying his small helicopter into real anti-aircraft fire for the first time. He looks at me soberly, steadily, with piercing blue eyes. He knows how to respond to various threats—never flying the same route twice, turning his turbine's exhaust port away from a heat-seeking

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missile in a last-second dart, other forms of evasion. The threat that worries him most, he says, is a Rocket Propelled Grenade blasted straight up from the ground as he buzzes in low. There's really no preparing for that.

Because of the media embedding that has made this an almost instant-broadcast war, the soldiers have gotten a close-up glimpse of what could lie ahead for them. Many were angry and riled when news arrived that Americans captured by the Iraqis had been abused and executed. Some said it was time to change the name of the effort from Operation Iraqi Freedom to Operation Iraqi Asswhuppin'.

Our military leaders had been expecting skullduggery. One intelligence briefing I observed warned that certain Iraqi military groups had purchased American-style uniforms, and that they aimed to commit atrocities against Iraqi citizens in these which they hoped would be blamed on coalition forces. But now the dirty tricks cascaded in some unexpected ways.

Everyone seemed surprised that there were false surrenders. A large number of Marines were wounded and killed when Iraqis waving the white flag suddenly pulled hidden weapons and attacked the Americans accepting their capitulation. Another group of Marines was forced to halt a firefight when the Special Republican Guard unit they were battling dragged a number of women and children into their front lines. The Americans pulled back, unsure how to proceed. In other places, Baath Party irregulars shed their uniforms and began to fight in civilian clothes. Of course, the people most endangered by these dishonorable actions were everyday Iraqis, whom American troops were now forced to treat as risks, rather than people needing help.

Iraqi POWs Prisoners held at a desert camp. They are given medical care, food, and shade, while American POWs are being murdered and abused.

No matter how graphic the TV footage in the mess hall, however, the troops never get grim. This afternoon, as I sat writing from some notes spread across my cot, a clutch of black and white soldiers clustered ten feet away, kicking back in our shady tent on this hot day, reminiscing warmly about favorite odd foods cooked by their mothers and grandmothers: pigs feet, pickled cabbage, apple butter, red hot dogs, chitterlings, fried cornbread, mountain oysters (bull testicles), boudin (Creole rice-and-blood sausage). "My granddaddy used to give me whiskey, honey, and a piece of peppermint mixed in a glass when I was sick," smiled one sergeant. "Man, we used to pretend something was achin' just to get some of that."

Brand New Game Plan

MARCH 25—The camp was aflutter all night, and today we learned the 82nd is going into action. General Swannack offered a briefing on the division's fresh orders at 08:30 Zulu time. (Zulu, or "Z" hours refer to Greenwich Mean Time, the global standard which the military uses for operations to avoid confusion as orders cross time zones.) The division had been assigned an entirely new mission. Instead of seizing Baghdad International Airport by parachute assault—the 82nd's long-planned assignment as part of the final move on Iraq's capital city—our men were now tasked to take up their other specialty: urban warfare.

As the Army's 3rd Infantry Division and the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force raced up Highway 8 toward Baghdad, they largely bypassed the cities along the route. After being ringed by coalition forces, Basra, Iraq's second largest metropolis, quickly erupted in street fighting between Iraqis revolting against Saddam Hussein and hardcore defenders of the regime. British forces were given the task of stabilizing that city.

The next town up the highway, Nasiriyah, has been the locale of some of the sharpest fighting in the south, including all the dirty tricks of false surrenders, fighting in civilian clothing, using innocents as shields. It too was sealed off for door-to-door cleanup, this to be done by the Marines.

At this writing, the third city up the Euphrates, Samawah, is likewise being used as a hiding ground for hardcore Baath Party fighters and *fedayeen* partisans. They are carrying out terrorism across the city, and guerilla warfare in the countryside—including ambushing the U.S. supply convoys that pass by on their way toward Baghdad. After engaging, these fighters melt back into the streets of the 180,000-person urban area. The 82nd has been ordered to clean these irregulars out of the city.

And so, within a span of hours, the entire brigade has had to shift its plans from a parachute assault to an infantry sweep. Most of the troopers will drive the 240 miles to Samawah in armed convoy. The rest will fly up in transport planes. I'll go by land, hoping to get a closer look at the terrain and battle sites along the way. We're told there has been a lot of shooting on this road.

Each of the soldiers has drawn 210 rounds for his M-4 or M-16, 45 rounds for his 9mm pistol, and more than 800 cartridges for the machine gunners. Lieutenant Colonel Gehler climbs onto the back of a humvee and gives a stern speech telling the troops to put on a combat mentality, to choose action over inaction, to be aggressive as soon as we cross the berm into Iraq. This route we'll be driving is where the heaviest action of the war has

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taken place, and it needn't be an enemy tank to be a threat—attacks are being made from schoolbuses, taxis, by people who look like civilians.

The colonel assures all that their rules of engagement allow unencumbered self-defense against any apparent threat. No radioing for permission to shoot. No more asking for orders.

If the convoy is attacked, the escorted vehicles will keep moving at all costs. But the 70 members of Alpha Troop cavalry assigned to provide the helicopter battalion with security will pull over and engage the enemy with the Mark 19 grenade launchers, .50 caliber guns, TOW missile launchers, and .240 bravo machine guns mounted on the roofs of their humvees, plus the rifles they carry. I'm riding in one of these gun trucks with three Alpha troopers: Private O'Connor, Sergeant Campos, and Lieutenant Mosby.

When the division's various elements regroup closer to Samawah, new base camps will be established from which daily missions can be run into the city and outlying lairs. Saddam's guerillas will be tracked down and eliminated. It promises to be delicate and dangerous work.

In Iraq

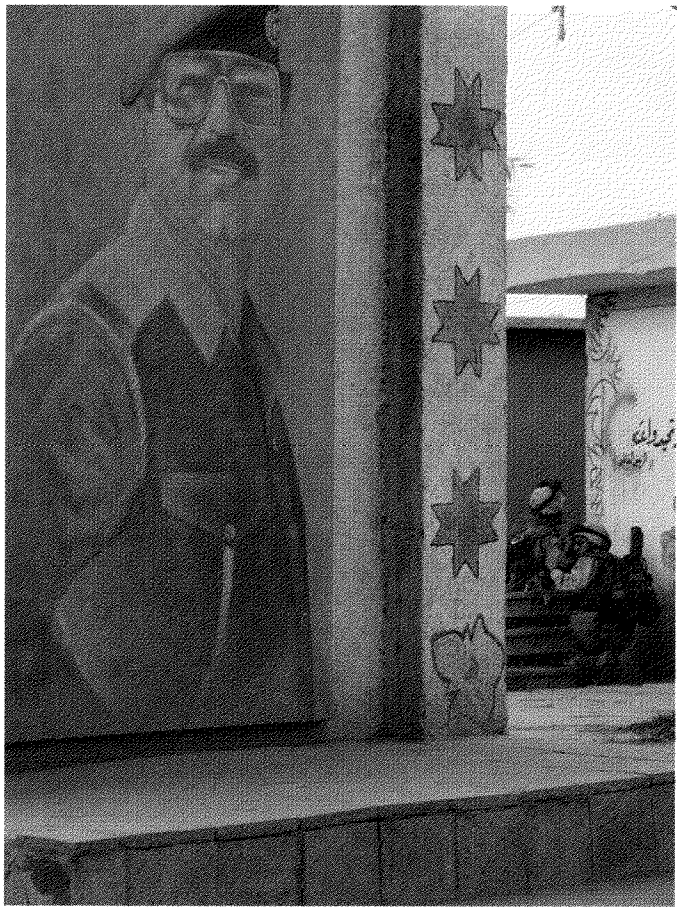
It's an eerie feeling rolling down a crowded highway at up to 40 miles per hour, with all the vehicle lights taped over, in total darkness. Everyone except me is wearing night vision goggles. (Which infantrymen call NODs; pilots prefer the term NVGs.) Even goggled up, though, driving in blackout is dangerous. Several hours into our trip, a Kuwaiti truck on a dirt road crossing our highway, himself driving with no lights, piles into the side of one of the darkened humvees, injuring two soldiers and sending the driver of the pickup through the windshield.

Taking part in a convoy like this makes you realize how much of the Army is just a giant trucking operation. Supply, supply, supply. Literally hundreds of cargo carriers of all descriptions roar down the road, humping troopers, fuel, water, food, rucksacks, generators, medical supplies, ammo, you name it.

Keeping this massive string of overstuffed vehicles together in a secure formation is an exercise in hurry-up and wait. There is a kind of science of secure convoying, and because of what is known as the "slinky effect," the limiting factor is the acceleration speed of the slowest freighter in the line. So most of the night we rumble along at about 30 mph or less. There are numerous stops for breakdowns, refueling, lost drivers, and the like.

Between the herky-jerky movement, the heavy stink of diesel, the rattle of loose sheetmetal, the hissing radio, and the lumpy armor and chem suits we're wearing inside the cramped humvees (seemingly designed for lower-body amputees), it's a blue-ribbon recipe for cabin fever and deep-vein thrombosis. But we're all a little keyed up and tolerate the physical displeasure surprisingly easily.

At 01:03 in the morning we cross a breach in the fence and enter Iraq. The road is lined with burned-out buildings and vehicle



Out With the Old, In With the New American paratroopers sneak into the city of Samawah during a morning raid, right under the eye of the maximum dictator.

hulks from the last Gulf War. But a shot-up armored personnel carrier and security truck are more recent relics of this week's fight. A dead man sits in the truck, his windshield perforated, his mouth open, his door swinging—an advertisement for tardy escape reflexes. Off in the distance, a large fire burns a hole in the horizon.

We're running up the infamous Highway of Death, where the rats fleeing Kuwait in 1991, their vehicles stuffed with plunder, were strafed and bombed into eternity by coalition pilots. Even in the inkiness of night, a series of vehicle graveyards shine alongside the road. As we edge closer to dawn, the sky becomes crystalline for the first time since I've been in the dust-swirled Middle East; a warmly familiar set of stars crowns our heads, even as the ground beneath our feet and wheels becomes ever more strange.

At 06:30, the lieutenant is driving, and after a long night of navigating and surfing the radio traffic he is falling asleep. Whenever he starts to swerve off the highway either the gunner (who, with his head sticking out of the top of the jeep, is wide awake in the cold air) or I, sitting behind the driver's seat, whack the lieutenant to waken him. After we stop, we hear that an identical drill was taking place in nearly all the vehicles, giving new meaning to the phrase "back seat driver."

Nearly 22 hours after our start, we pull off the highway and onto a narrow track. In the distance I notice what looks like…could it possibly be the Ziggurat of Ur? I pull out the binoculars and, sure enough, I'm thrilled to take in the instantly

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recognizable 4,000-year-old Sumerian temple constructed by the world's very first civilized humans. The civility of more recent residents is open to question, however. What kind of barbarian would build a massive concrete and steel military base right next to one of the three or four oldest human structures in the world?

For, turning onto a dirt road, we immediately enter one of Saddam Hussein's biggest air bases. Here, the 82nd will establish a forward camp. At the base entrance, there are two of the obligatory large portraits of the maximum leader. Next to the main one, however, some soldier with a sense of humor has erected a cardboard sign. It reads: Bush International Airport.

Home Away From Home

Tallil Air Base, South-Central Iraq, March 26—We eat our first food in nearly a day, MRE pot luck, inside one of the couple dozen ruined concrete bunkers where Saddam used to hide his MiGs. The bunkers are impressive in scale, but a close look shows the concrete work to be painfully shoddy. And the burned out jet and helicopter hulks in the yards outside testify to the insufficiency of Iraq's crude fortifying instincts.

This is Tallil Air Base, which used to be one of Iraq's strongholds. It was pounded by U.S bombers in the first Gulf War—some of the six-foot-thick concrete hangar walls have been neatly perforated by bunker-buster bombs, and the whole facility has taken on an air of rack and ruin, which is not surprising given that Iraq's air force nearly ceased to exist a dozen years ago. This was still an active military facility a week ago, however, until the Army's 3rd Infantry Division swept through and cleaned it out.

After it is cleared of bombs and debris, we'll set up a semi-permanent post in one of the abandoned bunkers. Tonight we're sleeping under the stars on a concrete apron. Determined to pack light I left my camping mat home, so tomorrow I'll be the guy with the flat spot on the back of his head.

Tallil Air Base In south-central Iraq, one of Saddam's largest military air bases has been taken over by new tenants, as this view of the gate from a moving humvee demonstrates.

We are on a huge plain with unsecured boundaries, and vulnerable to attack should there be any dead-enders in the area. Defensive preparations begin with the same action as in prairie schooner days: The wagons are circled in a tight loop around the mouth of the bunker. Patrols wearing NODs will watch our perimeter all night; they chamber cartridges as they move out. If nature calls, don't go out far or you could be mistaken for a haji.

Sergeant Major Weidhas is really taking care of me, as he does his soldiers. He suggests it would be a good idea for me to know how to use the sidearms that serve as a second weapon within the 82nd's ranks. He walks me through a quick tutorial on loading and firing the Army Beretta. He promises a primer on the standard M-4 carbine next.

Major Jim Corcoran, the regiment's helpful executive officer, has just briefed me on the latest details of our mission. U.S. mechanized units have the bottom crescent of Samawah sealed off. The 82nd will start in the east and sweep across the middle and top of the city. No one knows exactly what lies ahead, but a CIA agent inside the gates radioed in a whispered report during the night that members of the Fedayeen Saddam are holed up and preparing to defend the metropolis. Exploratory helicopter and infantry patrols will start tonight or tomorrow.

If the next city over is any model for what to expect in Samawah, there may be a hot reception. The Marines went into Nasiriyah yesterday and took 40 casualties in stiff street fighting. Dirty tricks continue. I am told it's been determined that the American soldiers taken prisoner and then executed in the early days of the war were caught by using children to lure them close to some camouflaged ditches where fighters lay in ambush.

Starting With A Bang

The men are in great spirits tonight, and ready for action. They're sober enough, though. Around sunset, a massive fireball erupts down the plain, followed by a mushroom cloud, and last a huge boom. The radio reports that an Army EOD (Explosive Ordnance Division) team exploded a large cache of mortars uncovered at the edge of the base. Irregulars had mortar tubes all set up, and rounds stockpiled, to unload on American positions under cover of darkness.

One powerfully built young officer confided shortly after the shock wave passed that the spectacular flames and noise were a reminder for him that military work is all about destruction and loud jolts and other scary things. These men aren't insensitive to the dangers around them, they just proceed in spite of them.

One of the squad commanders walks around to each of his helo pilots, one at a time, puts his face next to theirs, and asks if they're ready to fly tonight if the general calls. Are they rested enough to handle the trickiness of NVG-navigating for several hours? Are they mentally ready to get fired at? Colonel Gehler is lobbying hard for a decent night's sleep before his pilots enter the fray, but the infantry officers in the 325th are reportedly gung-ho to start whacking at the hornet's nest right away.

A friendly and handsome blond-haired pilot named Jeff Sumner invites me to use his camping stove to make some tea. We talk about our families. He was set to marry this month until the Middle East called. He says his fiancee, a pharmacist in Shreveport, Louisiana, was understanding. When interrogated about his flightworthiness Jeff somberly tells his leader he's tired but thinks he could do three or four hours under goggles if there's an emergency. Even if no helicopter mission is scheduled, a 911 call is always possible should some infantry unit get pinned down.

At the MedEvac facility being set up here at Tallil, we saw wounded soldiers and Marines being brought in this afternoon.

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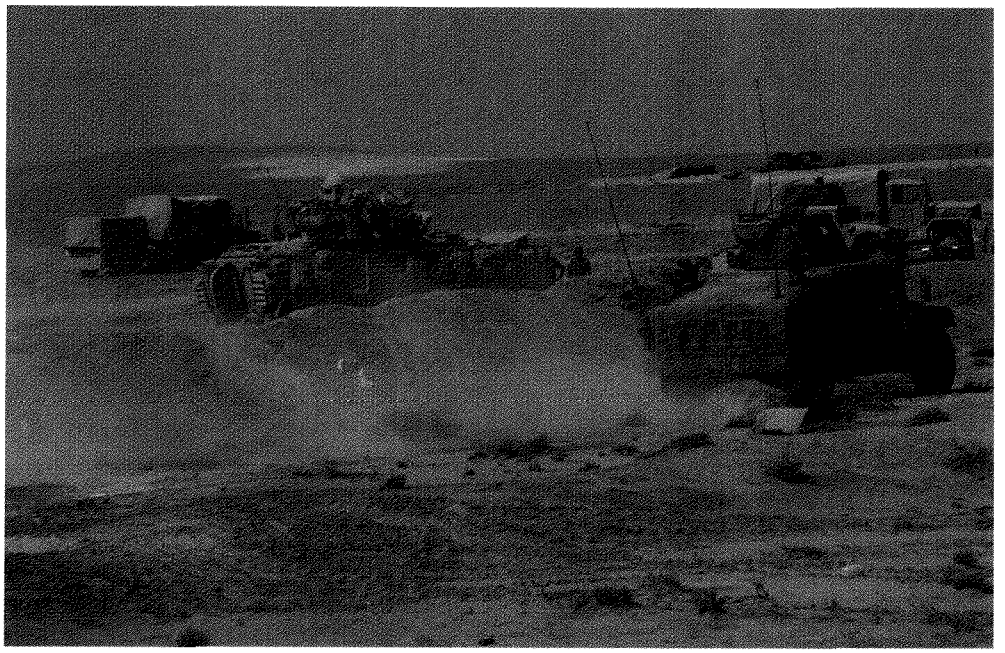

Desert Warfare A humvee from the 82nd races across Iraq's powdery dust as some armor and supply trucks appear in the background.

On the drive back across the base, Major Corcoran reports, there were dead bodies, tags on their toes, waiting in the same area.

At about 04:00 a soldier in full battle gear taps me in my sleeping bag. "Reynolds?"

"No, next man over."

"Reynolds, it's your turn for guard duty."

As I come to, I notice that not far off in the distance some helicopters are winding up. One takes off. Then another. I'm wondering who is behind the controls, and where they're going.

I look up at the sparkling sky. Then, with a lower glance, my brain takes in the bunker, the trucks, the outline of a rifle nearby. Still the same familiar stars. Still the same decidedly unhomelike land they're shining down upon.

Meat and Potatoes

I'm enjoying a split life: part of my day with the suave, tightly wound pilots, part with the earthier, more ribald cavalry troopers who provide the unit's ground security. A perfect meat and potatoes combination for warfighting, and also for storycollecting.

As I sat on the ground yesterday eating from a plastic pouch, two cavalry buddies being tormented by the swarming flies had an extended time-passing conversation on the cosmic justification for pests.

"What the hell use are flies? I'd like to know one good thing they do for the world."

"Dude, you're thinking small. I saw it on the Discovery Channel: Flies lay their eggs on trash and crap, and the maggots eat it all up."

"Hey, you could put a bucket of maggots on each of the craps we produced here today and there'd still be crap left behind when they're done."

"But not as much. Definitely less crap."

"Yeah, and then there's mosquitos. And fleas. And chiggers. I think there should be just one global, universal pest for all purposes. Fewer options out there to bother us."

"Man, you're such a white suburbanite! Thinking too much, all the time."

"Alright, then you tell me the reason for jellyfish. I am quite certain there is no good purpose for jellyfish. I mean…"

Cavalry are pretty much what the name implies—fast moving scouts and raiders who literally live on their mounts. Unlike the rest of the Army around them, they pitch no tents. They sleep on the hood, in the back, and across the unbelievably cramped seats of their humvees, nap in the shade underneath the trucks by day (because their most important guarding is often done at night), and remain always ready to roll on a moment's notice. Cavalry charge in to save more lightly armed soldiers when they get trapped or ambushed, protect command posts and supply lines, and swoop down to destroy enemy vehicles (including even tanks) in packs. The personalities of the troopers tend to be as slashing and devil-may-care as their duties.

And this is their moment. For helicopter pilots there are lots of thrills even in peacetime. For airborne infantry, jumping out of planes and fighting hand-to-hand in bullpens can be almost as challenging during training as in the real thing. But for cavalry troopers, it's almost impossible to recreate within a training exercise the free-floating, slash-and-burn buccaneering that combat brings.

Recovering from our 22-hour roadtrip, we are enjoying a lazy morning. Someone has built a fire to burn garbage, and the happy simpleton we'll call Ricky, who is a kind of mascot for the rest of the Alpha Troop, is fairly dancing around, exulting for hours over the POP!s he finds he can make by throwing empty water bottles into the flames with their caps on. Ricky is sweet-tempered, hard-working, and very slow-witted—and beloved by the other cavalrymen. Recounting Ricky stories is a favorite pastime among them.

Ricky is a driver, and this morning his sergeant is hilariously and quite profanely describing one of his latest foibles. It seems Ricky's determination to stick rigidly to the agreed speed limits during our convoy had him staring down, bent-necked, at the speedometer most of the night—to the point where he kept veering off the road. All night long it was "Watch out Ricky, you're on the shoulder!" "Get your damn eyes off the needle

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Ricky!" "What the hell good does it do to go the right speed, Rickster, if you're in the bushes?" and "Ricky, I'm not gonna yell if you go 24 instead of 25, but I'm gonna kill you if drive into that ditch!"

Sergeant Campos and Private O'Connor add a little firepower to our ride, digging out of its case an AT4 rocket (a kind of point-and-shoot disposable bazooka) to add to the humvee's rooftop armory. Lieutenant Mosby takes a few moments to synchronize the truck's plugger (GPS positioning device) with his handheld unit.

Out here with the cav I'm watching the *field* end of the Blue Force Tracker in action. Mosby was a computer science major at West Point and he's taken to the new toy with enthusiasm, tutoring some of the more electronics-averse sergeants around him on its fine points. Whereas a few months ago he would have perched in the front passenger seat with a paper map on his lap, he now has not only much better digital maps on an electronic screen, but also a rich source of what soldiers call "situational awareness." He has, for instance, just been looking up where the infantry elements of our task force were located last night.

Preparing for battle deepens the soldier's soul, encouraging forms of generosity, mutual respect, and friendship as no other occupation can.

Buried Nuts and Warthogs

TALLIL, MARCH 27—We uncovered a little surprise this morning. Just as I sat down for a breakfast of chicken and salsa some older guys decided that what looked like a buried wheel and hubcap, located maybe eight feet from me, was possibly an anti-tank mine. A humvee was parked just short of it, and the guys had been stumbling over it all night in the dark on their way out to pee. This morning, Cory O'Connor, who was in high school in Rhode Island ten months ago, actually jumped up and down on top of it. Curiosity, I guess.

Luckily, tank mines, unlike the anti-personnel versions, take thousands of pounds of pressure to detonate. Just the same, I pick a new breakfasting spot a little further back. Wouldn't want to get any dirt and rocks in my salsa.

After finishing the vegetable cracker with peanut butter and the poundcake (I'd rate it about 7 on a 16 ounce scale), I walk over to look at a huge stinging centipede one guy has cornered. Turns out he (the trooper, not the centipede) was in this exact location back in '91.

"There were about 50 tanks in this air base that we had to take out. The 82nd Airborne had Sheridan armored vehicles back then, and I was in one. Almost met my maker here, actually, at the hand of some Iraqis hiding behind a berm. But between aerial bombs and our TOW missiles and A-10s we finally killed the tanks off. Then we destroyed all the aircraft here. After we ran out of rounds to blast them with we started running over the Hind and Hip helicopters with our Sheridan."

Sergeant Cory Kroll—perfectly described to me as having an exterior as gruff as a Montana grizzly bear enfolding the persona of a kindly father of four girls—tells a similar story. He entered Tallil after Air Force planes and Army attack helicopters had softened things up, but still took heavy fire. "I was the gunner in an armored personnel carrier and we killed a T-55 tank and a bunker. But there were some close calls. An Iraqi jumped up from a camouflaged position and fired an RPG that whistled right between the turrets of my armored personnel carrier and the one next to me."

The Air Force must be gaining confidence in the security of the Tallil air field, because a squadron of A-10 Thunderbolts has just been moved in here to support the infantry operations to the north. Popularly known as the Warthog, the A-10 is a legendary plane, unslick in every regard, but beloved of any American military man who has ever put boot to earth with a rifle on his back.

Even an Air Force ground controller like Buddy McArthur, who makes his living calling in close air strikes from B-52s, F-15s, B-1s and other needle-nosed craft toting cool laser-guided munitions, says his favorite tool for sheer effectiveness is the A-10. The troopers who've maneuvered with A-10s swear the plane noticeably slows whenever it fires its massive six-barrel 30 mm cannon. In fact, they claim that's why the gun was mounted offset on the fuselage—because early models where it was mounted parallel actually stalled in the air during heavy firing. In any case, the plane has a mighty unhealthful effect on enemy tanks and infantry.

But this is a war where good weapons are only one part of the solution. Captain Robin Brown just stopped by with the latest news. She's the battallion's efficient, spirited operations officer. (She and her husband are both helicopter pilots; he's currently vacationing in Afghanistan while she entertains herself further south.) She reports that a minivan roared through an Army checkpoint just north of here and exploded a suicide bomb, killing five soldiers.

Overall, however, the night's momentum flowed strongly in the other direction. Hot off the C-130s that brought them north from Camp Champion, infantrymen from the 82nd's 1st Battalion of the 325th Regiment trucked up to the fringes of Samawah, disembarked, and maneuvered on foot up to a ditch and berm some Iraqi fighters had dug along a major pipeline. They killed 17 enemy during the night, while sustaining no casualties of their own, and took numerous prisoners of war, who are now corralled behind some wire just down the road from where I sit. If I had to guess, Colonel Bray was right there along the berm himself much of the night.

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Up in the Air

During our first eerie night at Tallil, before any helicopter sorties had been run, there was a distinct, understandable edginess in the pilots' tents. But the next day, having flown a few missions without encountering any especially nasty anti-aircraft fire, the old surety and humor came back. Show me a cocky pilot and I'll show you a happy pilot.

Kiowa Warrior CW3 Shon "Hitman" Thompson pilots one of the 82nd's light attack helicopters.

The infantry pushing into Samawah from the east were taking mortars in addition to rifle fire, and the Kiowas went up repeatedly to add extra firepower. Lieutenant Sosa fired a Hellfire missile into a building being used as a site to rain mortars down on the 325th. Mortar silenced, eight guerillas dead. Just now, the radio has crackled news that pilots Kirschbaum and Marx rocketed a motorcycle that had been spraying AK-47 fire as it raced down a street.

A little earlier, Charlie Company Commander Jack Murphy, a fun-loving pilot with a stock of stories about Canadian girlfriends from his years at Fort Drum in northern New York, encountered a hostile crowd of about 40 irregulars in an open area. They began firing AK-47s at his Kiowa. He responded by launching a shrapnel-filled flechette rocket, ending that threat.

The Kiowas were returning with their missile racks empty after each sortie, then cycling back out to lay more Hellfires and rockets on paramilitaries and the buildings from which they were firing and mortaring. Our pilots were getting as well as giving. Kirschbaum and Marx returned from one flight with six bullet holes through the underbelly of their bird. Surprisingly, given the light build of the Kiowa, there were no injuries and the helicopter remained flyable. "The shots missed the fuel tank. And fortunately they passed through a narrow six inch strip that's directly between two sensitive areas which, if hit, would almost certainly have ignited an electrical fire," Commander Murphy tells me.

In addition, landing after dark has turned out to be dangerous, because the powdery dust kicked up on descent makes the ground invisible even in night vision goggles. There were some hard landings before the decision was made to suspend black-out operations, perhaps until some Rhino Snot (a kind of plasticizer) can be sprayed on the sand and dust to seal a landing surface. Of course the on-call Quick Reaction Force is an exception; if there are soldiers in danger, they'll fly despite the risk.

Overall, it's been a solid stretch for the aviation regiment. Captain Brown is ebullient when I run into her: "We were kicking ass today."

Closer to the Front

Plans Change

THE IRAQI DESERT SOUTH OF SAMAWAH, MARCH 28—If you can't roll with a punch and adapt to entirely new circumstances within a fingersnap, you don't belong in warfighting. Just now it's been decided that, less than 24 hours after settling into this abandoned bunker, the battalion needs to have a base closer to Samawah. Tallil is still about 45 minutes flying time from the main battle zone, and by the time the Kiowas get there and back, and leave themselves a small fuel cushion, they only have enough fuel for 30-45 minutes of fighting time.

So a skeleton crew will pull up stakes and set up a small command center and good sized FARP (Forward Arming and Refueling Point) much closer to Samawah. That'll give the helicopters a place to quickly pick up more ammo and fuel before they hop back into the fray inside the city. I decide to follow the action north. My friends in the Alpha Troop cavalry are being dispatched to provide security for this new base, which will start as little more than a few tents and a huge jet fuel bladder or string of tankers in the dust alongside the road. I squeeze into a gun truck with Sergeant Cory Kroll, Specialist Josh Farley, and Private Chad Stapp (who appear on the cover of this magazine).

On the drive up, the radio was crackling with reports of frenetic action by the Kiowa pilots, and I'm suddenly wondering if I should have stayed back at the main air base where I could debrief the pilots as they came off shift. When the future FARP site turns out to be a hellhole of Iraqi hellholes—a wasteland of shoe-deep dust without so much as a blade of living growth—I again second-guess my judgment in drifting out here. I wouldn't lay down to sleep in this red-brown talcum powder, full of scorpions and stinging centipedes, if the alternative was to stand all night.

The only domicile in sight for miles on this flat, treeless plain, is a 15' x 15' tent—which turns out to be the brand new world headquarters of the 82nd Airborne Division. Unbeknownst to me, the Commanding General also wanted to get closer to the action than Tallil allowed, so he has relocated his command center to the site of the FARP-to-be. Talk about direct access to the brass: Suddenly I'm part of the inner circle whether anyone wants me there or not.

Literally the only objects in this dust bowl aside from the dust are three large tanker trucks laden with jet fuel (the downpayment on a helo gas station), six gun trucks, and the lonely command tent with a handful of humvees parked next to it. Inside the canvas flaps of the CG's temporary battle center are the top dozen officers running the division. Alpha Troop's gun trucks positioned in a ring around them provide a total of about 20 men, 15 truck-mounted weapons, and some of the best thermal night sights possessed by the U.S. Army.

And that is literally all that blocks General Swannack and his brain trust (as well as the rest of us) from becoming casualties or

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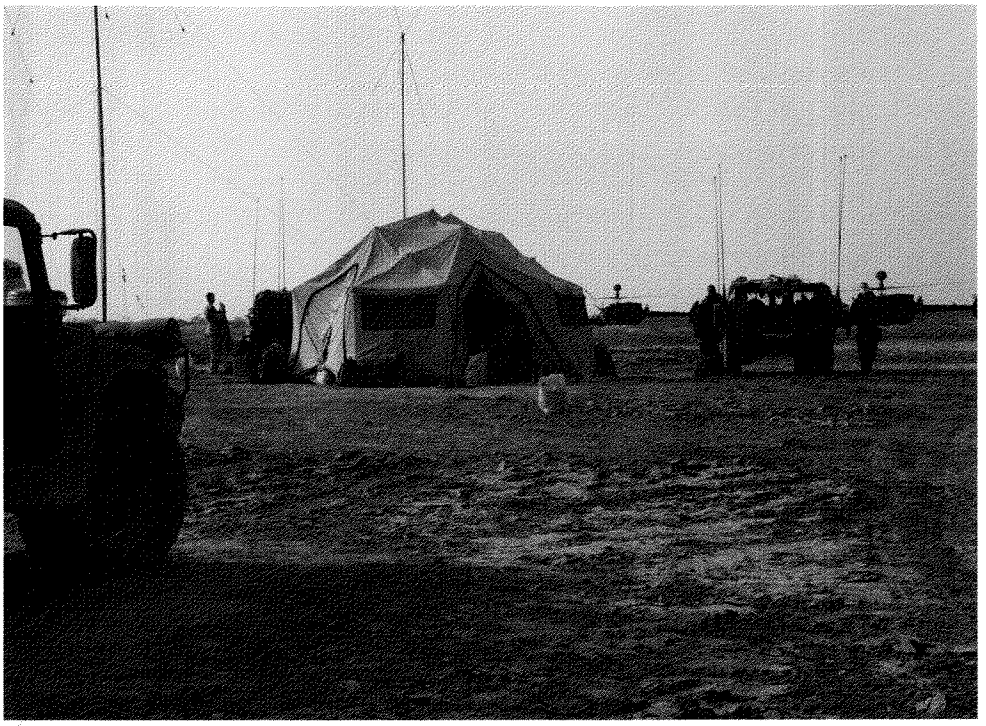
prisoners of war in an enemy hot zone. All day long this immediate area has seen mortar firings, artillery strikes, and paramilitary infiltrations. Very nearby, a Bradley came over a berm and stumbled upon a group of Iraqi irregulars, blasting them into oblivion. The 325's foot soldiers are now sweeping through Samawah proper, routing enemy positions and wracking up dozens of kills every day. Yet in a ring all around us, the magical optics reveal, the desert still crawls with suspicious men.



World Headquarters of the 82nd Airborne For two nights, this lonely tent in the central Iraq desert outside of Samawah, guarded by just two dozen men, was the secret battle headquarters of General Swannack and the division staff.

On Hair Trigger

As the night deepens, F-16s thud 500-pound bombs onto buildings just north of us, then circle back above our heads to boom, boom, boom a second and third and fourth and fifth time. Later, we watch an American M-1 pound out several rounds at some other target. Meanwhile, the gunner manning the TOW missile launcher on the roof of our humvee, southern Californian Josh Farley, is finding a regular ant farm of activity out in the darkness between us and Samawah.

This crew values the optical sight of the TOW as least as much as the weapon itself. If we get close enough to a tank to need a TOW somebody hasn't done his job. But the imaging system—a quarter-million dollars worth of glass and electronics—is an invaluable tool for surveilling one's day and night surroundings at up to several miles away. "We can see a guy smoking a cigarette miles out. At a half mile we can see facial expressions and if they have weapons," reports Sergeant Kroll.

"Sergeant, I see a black SUV. Looks almost like a small bus. Now it's meeting up with a pickup truck. Several men are getting out," says Farley.

"Range?"

"Lasing now. 2205 meters."

"Any weapons visible?"

"I can't quite see."

"I want you to track them tightly, Farley, you hear?"

"I've also got four dismounted individuals climbing up on some buildings. I was watching those buildings in daylight, sergeant, and they were empty. Now they're climbing up on the roof of the buildings. They're out at 5153 meters."

"What are they doing?"

"The ones on the ground seem to be handing something up to the ones on the roof. I can confirm that now; they're handing up boxes."

"Weapons?"

"They're too far to tell."

"That's beyond TOW range, Farley. Our max shot is around 3750 meters. Give me a grid and I'll call those dudes in to Gillespie's mortar crew."

"365/593"

"Meanwhile we'll get on the radio to see if there might be any friendlies out in those sectors. I'll bet the farm those are bad dudes, the way they're acting. But they could just be Bedouins stashing MREs. They were picking them up along the convoy route and taking them out of broken down transport trucks all day long.

"And there *are* some Special Forces who operate in this area out of SUVs and other non-tactical vehicles. That's how you can get fratricide if you're not careful. So just keep watching them Farley. We'll ask our Air Force controllers to have somebody fly over them and see if they can tell anything more about what they're doing.

"Now you go back to that SUV and pickup, Farley. Don't lose them."

"They're parking behind a dirt ridge, about four feet high. But I can still see their hoods over the top. Actually, now the pickup is gone. Damn. Let me look for it."

"Don't worry about those dirt berms. Your TOW missile will rip right through them. You know that, right?"

"Roger. All right, I got the pickup again. It's moving. Toward us. Fast. It's running behind a little levee, roughly southwest. Range now 1900 meters."

"If you see any pink tracers I want you to light up that vehicle, Farley, you got that? Right now, right quick."

"Roger. Range now 1815."

"Don't nobody stand behind that missile tube for about 70 feet, or you'll get toasted. And Karl, be ready for a bad ass noise."

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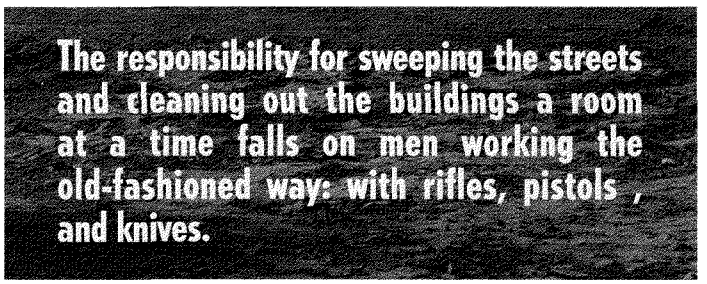
And so for about 45 tense minutes we were on the brink of launching a missile and mortar strike. Eventually, the action out in the dark subsided. These may be Iraqi irregulars up to no good. But following the general pattern of this war it's decided to wait for them to reveal themselves as a definite threat rather than take the risk of hitting some Bedouins or friendlies. Farley and co-gunner Chad Stapp carefully track the quadrant in front of us all night, ready to pull a trigger on a moment's notice if a weapon is spotted, occasionally getting a start when a desert hare leaps across their lens.

The individuals out there in the gloam could never guess they are being so closely watched from far away. They have no clue they're being repeatedly illuminated, because the laser on the TOW is invisible to the naked eye. Sometimes Farley will point out to an adjoining gun truck a person in need of watching by painting him with his laser while the other cavalryman observes through a night vision lens. "Man, I'm gonna give this guy cancer from lasing him so much," Farley jokes.



The trucks 30 yards to our north and 100 yards south represent the final outposts of local civilization, with miles and miles of hostile territory stretching to the horizon in all directions. In total blackness, these few Americans hunt predators who are hunting us. Our lives depend on their competence and stamina.

Meanwhile, the F-16 bomb drops and the tank firing have ceased. The paramilitaries of Samawah took a hard beating from the 82nd Airborne today, but tomorrow will be another day. The radio traffic in our hummer reveals that the general staff hidden behind blackout canvas a stone's throw away is planning a feint tomorrow morning, aiming to draw the Republican Guard and supporting militias out from their holes. It's been an exhausting, high-tension evening.

And I'm extremely glad I didn't stay back at Tallil to interview pilots, or spend the night over at the general's battle tent. For I've just witnessed several vivid hours of ground-level warfighting, in which a grizzled veteran sergeant and a sharp-eyed young soldier uncovered, sorted, and dispatched a range of threats. It is reliable repetition of this kind of basic soldiering, repeated over and over by thousands of individuals in hundreds of places, that makes our Army so formidable.

As I type this it is the middle of the night, and I'm being swept by a wave of fatigue. I'm not expecting any more than a few restless hours of sleep snatched upright in a rough truck seat, but even that suddenly seems a great luxury. For no sleep at all—and conceivably not even another sweet day of life—would accrue to me or the other individuals in this circle of trucks if it wasn't for a handful of tough men willing to force themselves awake all night: scanning, studying, aligning cross-hairs on threats, watching to make sure no armed killers crawl into our laps. They are literally the only reason that I (and, at longer range, you and the rest of America) can drift off peacefully when slumber beckons.

Thanks, guys.

Sheet Metal Mattress

A sheet metal mattress, a Kevlar pillow, a warm groaning engine beneath me, and a 105 millimeter long-range alarm clock. Put it together and it yields my softest sleep in two weeks.

Kroll and Stapp curled up in their front seats, and Farley flitted between his rooftop gun nest and a poncho spread on the ground next to the truck. So I unrolled my sleeping bag on the hood of the humvee, my helmet wedged on the airlift hook to prevent me from rolling down the slope and off the nose. Every couple of hours the team would start up the humvee to recharge the batteries of the large computer that runs the TOW sight and aiming mechanism. Which turned out to be be pure pleasure. The diesel underneath me sent a very wife-like warmth rippling through my bag—most welcome on another of those cloudless desert nights where all earthly heat races off to the icy stars above at the speed of light. I nearly purred along with the idling diesel.

At 05:52 I was awakened by perhaps 40 explosive beeps from a howitzer located due north. The battle of Samawah had never stopped—Sergeant Kroll says the radio reported another hot firefight in the city through the night. The 1st and 3rd Battallions of the 325th infantry pushed right up to the Euphrates bridges, not quite halfway into town, apparently killing another dozen gunmen without suffering any casualties of their own. The American artillery rounds we're continuing to hear are being called in by our troopers downtown.

The sun started the day as just a soft, moon-like lozenge on the horizon, but burned hotter and higher with each turret recoil. Now, an hour after cresting land's edge, it reveals its burning truth. No longer masquerading as a passive reflector of someone else's light it announces a hot and airless day ahead. The two-inch-long flying ants which swarm at night disappear, but the flies and biting gnats descend on us in infuriating force.

At one point General Swannack actually tells someone to call the preventive medicine department and have them do something to control the flies in the area. "If PM gets rid of these flies I'll pin a damn medal on them," he roars. The entire swatted-out command staff heartily urges him to make this today's number one battle priority. We may be badly outnumbered, but angry U.S. forces have declared war on their winged nemeses.

Meanwhile, my laptop batteries are flat from a night of writing. So I hike a mile down the road to the FARP where the helicopter battalion is based. I stride the whole way in camel tracks,

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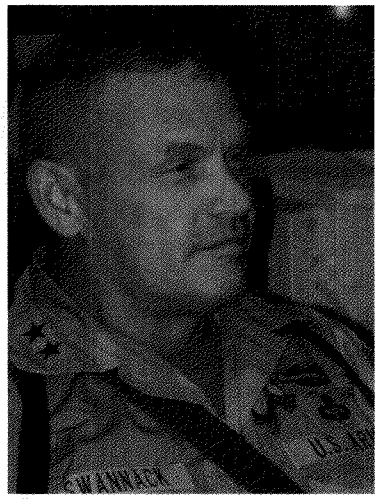
which are thick as fallen leaves here, and provide solider traction than the uncompacted powdery dust.

First I get an update in the tiny aviation HQ tent on the last 24 hours of aerial work. And then I call once again upon the kindness of Sergeant Bert Foley. The sergeant lived in Seattle for several years, where he developed a loving coffee addiction. He hands out coffee-flavored hard candies mailed over by his wife, and has brought an inverter which converts his humvee's 24 volt battery to 110 volt power useable by his coffee maker each morning. Once I discover this, the inverter is also used on more than one afternoon to juice my Apple. I think of this as re-arming my weapon—because when my laptop's dead I'm out of the war.

When the situation reports flow in at the end of the day, it's clear the U.S. military is still very much in a war. This night will feature some of the most concerted bombing of the campaign, with the Air Force planning to drop something like 1,500 separate packages, many of them hammering the Medina Division, Saddam's most cohesive tank corps which blocks the southern approach to Baghdad. This is the final preparation for a climactic push to the capital starting tomorrow night. The U.S. 3rd Infantry Division and other units will blast up through the Karbala Pass, which promises a mighty tank battle.

Hellfires to Avoid Damnation



Commanding General Major General Chuck Swannack is boss in the 82nd Airborne.

APRIL 1—April Fool's Day. I've just spent my second night on the hood. I'm going on a month without running water. I haven't had my current pants or shirt off in more than a week and temperatures are starting to hit 100 degrees. Even with my new airborne high-taper cut I've got a bad case of helmet hair, and, like others here, I'm getting lots of desert bloody noses. So I guess the joke's on me.

But I'm surrounded by noble spirits. And I managed to shave and give myself a highly satisfying wash this morning with two and a half cups of water. So I can't help feeling bubbly.

The uncomplaining stamina and toughness of the cav troopers continues to astound me. As usual, Josh and Chad alternated on two hour shifts, while the Sergeant was on call all night making final judgments. They were glued to their scopes to make sure no one would creep up on us, or lob high explosives onto our heads. By the time they're deployed back home, these guys will have gone literally months without laying in a bed.

This morning a dozen of us crowd into the tiny command tent, hunching on crates and boxes of water. At 10:07 a radio call from Colonel Bray comes in, asking for a surgical strike to take out a building in Samawah. The CIA reports that two high officials of southern Iraq's Baath Party are meeting there right now. The structure is also being used as a command post for coordinating attacks by irregulars throughout the city.

But this is a war where the U.S. is taking extraordinary measures to avoid any actions which might hurt innocent people or inflame Iraqi or international opinion. "You know that'll require approval from the four-star level [General Tommy Franks at CentCom headquarters in Qatar]," growls General Swannack. "Have you considered other methods of taking out the building's occupants from your location?" The infantry had, and concluded it would take too long to stage enough foot soldiers to storm the premises. "Let me work on this," the CG concluded tersely.

Instantly, the intelligence officer and judge advocate sprang to check the quality of the intelligence justifying the strike, and to assess the desirability and practicality of such an action. In a whisker, they had the CIA agent on the radio. "It's humint [human intelligence]. We have a source who has proven extremely reliable over the past ten days. Most of the aerial bombing we've called in during that period has been based on his information. We've learned from this source that Muhayfan Halwan, the number one Baath party official in the Salman region down on the Saudi border has come up to meet with Sultan Al-Sayf, the number two Baath guy in this region. As of 09:15 this morning they were planning future ops in this compound."

Simultaneously, the CG asks for double confirmation and pinpointing of the location of the building from forces on the ground. An intelligence officer in the corner pivots to his laptop and begins to search a database of known Baath Party offices to see if there is any match. He checks the known uses of nearby buildings.

"That grid coordinate shows one school 135 meters from the target building, and several others in the area beyond 200 meters," he relays to the CIA officer.

"Yeah, but since the shooting started school hasn't been meeting in this area. We believe those schools are empty."

On the side, the judge advocate is reminding other officers of this war's rules of engagement. "A building may be fired on if it is a source of active fire or imminent danger. This can even include mosques, whatever, in extreme circumstances. But otherwise the basic ground rule we're operating under is that preplanned destruction of Iraqi buildings—not just sensitive buildings, but *any* building—must be approved at the highest level by Central Command."

Then the CIA agent summarizes his case strongly, "Look, if two heads of the Baath Party can be taken out here today, that sends a powerful signal to the enemy. Then your infantry push proceeds to the bridges tonight as planned. And very quickly, resistance looks futile. This could definitely hasten the liberation of Samawah within the next 48 hours or so."

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18 pound Hammer

After some crosstalk, amidst a cacophony of radioed details, this quickly becomes the consensus position. The CG picks up a handset and explains the request to the staff of General Franks. "I'm looking for a precision strike from fixed wing aircraft on grid coordinate NV 256/635," he concludes.

The JAG suggests that CentCom be informed the building can be lased by a hovering Kiowa Warrior to ensure that the bomb goes exactly where it's wanted, further reducing the chances of any collateral damage. Then the CG jumps in. "Maybe we should just have the Kiowas lob a couple of Hellfires into the building." The communications officer quietly places a call. Across the plain, turbines begin to wind and pilots scramble.

Colonel McDonald, the fire support officer or FSO, draws out the thread: "The smallest Air Force precision bomb has a 500 pound warhead, versus 18 pounds of high explosive on a Hellfire. If we're looking to minimize risks of destruction overflow, maybe that's enough."

The JAG continues the thinking out loud. "On the other hand, there's a big political and psychological component to this strike, and if we're trying to send a message, a bigger boom is better—so long as we're comfortable we're not gonna get unwanted collateral damage."

Then a new voice, apparently calling from an airplane, rasps across the radio waves. "All-American 6, this is Thunder X-ray. I need to talk to your forward controller about laser illumination versus other means of acquiring the target." This seems to be an AWACS controller, or perhaps even a pilot, getting down to nitty gritty. That suggests CentCom approval may be coming, and surprisingly rapidly. In a quick conversation, it appears the munition most easily available is a 2,000 pound satellite-guided bomb.

"I think 2,000 pounds might be overkill. If we get approval, let's consider using the Hellfires. Less chance of messing up nearby buildings and houses," states one of the officers.

Just as these final details are being debated there is a beating of Black Hawk rotors and a cloud of dust. Everyone in the tent stands up. Lieutenant General William Wallace, the V Corps commander out of Germany, who currently controls the 82nd Airborne and other divisions in this theater, slides under the tent flap for a previously scheduled update.

First he's quickly briefed on the possible strike at the Baath officials. As this is happening, Thunder X-ray once again hisses over the radio. It's 11:16, a little more than an hour from when the initial request came in, and the strike has been O.K.'d. But it's been modified based on the preceding discussion. "You are to destroy the building with Hellfires using visual spotting," he crackles from on high.

"OK.," begins General Swannack, "based on the size of that building I want you to put at least a couple Hellfires into it to make sure we destroy it." Then he returns to his boss at his elbow. General Wallace is extremely soft-spoken, almost

Scouting for Enemies A Kiowa helicopter as it swoops across the barrenness of central Iraq.

mute. He seems deeply tired. The discussion between the generals turns to current operations to free Samawah.

An anecdote that came in from Colonel Bray this morning is passed along. A young boy presented himself to soldiers from the 325th with a note from his father in broken English offering to share information on the location and operations of the guerillas. Details would have to await the arrival of an interpreter, but the colonel explained that this was just one of a surge of incidents suggesting the city's populace was coming to trust American intentions and would be cooperating more and more.

Some unconfirmed intelligence is laid out for the visiting general: There are sketchy reports that suicide teams are arriving from Syria and Lebanon; the suicide attacks seen so far may be the work of people other than Iraqis. There are hints that up to half of all the fighters previously in the city may have given up or fled the area. A major explains that this is based on signals intelligence—information intercepted in a newly launched program to monitor local cell phones.

Then the 82nd's CG spins toward his FSO, who is on the line with the helicopter battalion. "All right, what's the status of the Hellfire shoot?"

"Sir, the KWs [Kiowa Warriors] are inbound now."

"How many Hellfires are they hauling?"

"Four missiles, sir. They're going to fire them all and we'll see what happens." (That'll make it a big event for the pilots I've been hanging with. Each Hellfire costs about as much as a Mercedes.)

"Right. Immediately after the shoot I want a DA [damage assessment] so we can see the results."

"Will do, sir."

Now we can hear the pilots on the radio. "Red Wolf to All-American: approaching site."

"Roger, let me know when you have a shot."

The room falls silent, awaiting a denouement. The two generals, who clearly have no more than a formal relationship, sit uneasily shoulder-to-shoulder, sending parallel stares silently down at the map that's taped to the table in front of them. We all listen to the rasping communication between the pilots.

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"Still trying to get a shot?" presses the CG.

"Just seconds, sir. Just seconds."

But in truth it's more like minutes, and then more minutes. "Let's hope Baath leaders like to linger over their tea," someone cracks.

Now the Black Hawks are spooling up. General Wallace can't wait any longer and must depart for his next hop. Both commanders step out of the tent, gusting a wave of accumulated tension out between the flaps with them.

The Gentlest War

After seeing off his superior officer, General Swannack slips back in. At 11:52 the radio finally crackles a live report from the pilots: "Two missiles fired." Then a minute later. "Third missile in." An awkward hesitation, then more reporting from the air: "A pickup truck just raced away from the side entrance. Three individuals inside. There's another empty truck on the other side. Should I engage it?"

Momentary whirring of mental wheels, then two or three officers blurt out the same thing. "No! Save that last missile. Go find and engage the truck with the men in it. Leave the empty one alone."

The FSO relays that instruction, but almost right away a reply comes back. "Negative. Truck proceeded only one block north, and then turned into side streets."

"In other words, they lost him," summarizes someone, with disappointment in his voice.

"See if you can re-acquire that vehicle," says the CG with surprising calm. But a few minutes later it's clear the truck and its occupants are long gone. The damage assessment: clean holes in the side of the building, no secondary explosions. No building collapse. No knowledge of who escaped, who was stopped inside.

"Looks like we needed a bigger punch," says General Swannack quietly.

And so ended another judicious—probably too judicious—application of force by the U.S. military. What I witnessed were extraordinary efforts to avoid cracking any innocent eggs. In the end, smaller rather than larger weapons were selected. And as a result, the bad guys may have gotten away. (Or maybe not. It does appear the strike made someone angry—*fedayeen* mortars flung several rounds in our direction within minutes of the loosing of the Hellfires.)

Such are the tough choices and uncertainties of a war being conducted with unusual restraint and even gentleness, by commanders aiming to be accepted as saviors rather than conquerors. It is a pattern I've seen recur over and over again in this fight. The real story of the Iraq war thus far, I suggest, has been the leverage the U.S military has foregone, not the leverage it has applied. Military leaders have been shooting for the hearts and minds of everyday Iraqis as much as for the gangsters of the Baath Party. Anyone who tells the world otherwise is just plain wrong.

The King Speaks

In late afternoon, while I was on my satellite phone dictating a story for publication back home, I heard a loud explosion quite nearby, and then saw a plume rising hundreds of feet into the air behind the headquarters tent, which obscured my view of the impact site. Soldiers were throwing on body armor; others raced up with their rifles to take positions along the four-foot-high earth berm of an old agricultural canal bounding the immediate rear of our camp here. I hung up and stepped into the command center.

Almost immediately a familiar voice popped onto the radio. It was Sergeant Kroll, reporting that immediately after the incoming round landed on the plain in front of his humvee, Farley spotted several trucks in his TOW sight fleeing a location between us and Samawah. I grinned to myself. My boys out there were watching our back.

Meanwhile, the software on the radars set up by the division's 319 artillery regiment identified the projectile—based on warhead speed, size, and parabola—as likely coming from a D-30 howitzer, a formidable weapon that the Iraqi forces in Samawah were not at that point known to possess. The D-30 has a range of over 15 kilometers. We were sitting on an open plain about 12 kilometers from the city.

Reload One round fired, another on the way.

At this point the FSO got up and put on his helmet. The artillery radars are not foolproof, and sometimes give false readings. Others in the tent began to josh that he seemed a little too nervous. "Hey, you can do what you want," he ribbed right back, "but I know The King [his affectionate term for the power of heavy artillery]. I respect the King. I've seen what The King can do. And I'm putting on my damn Kevlar."

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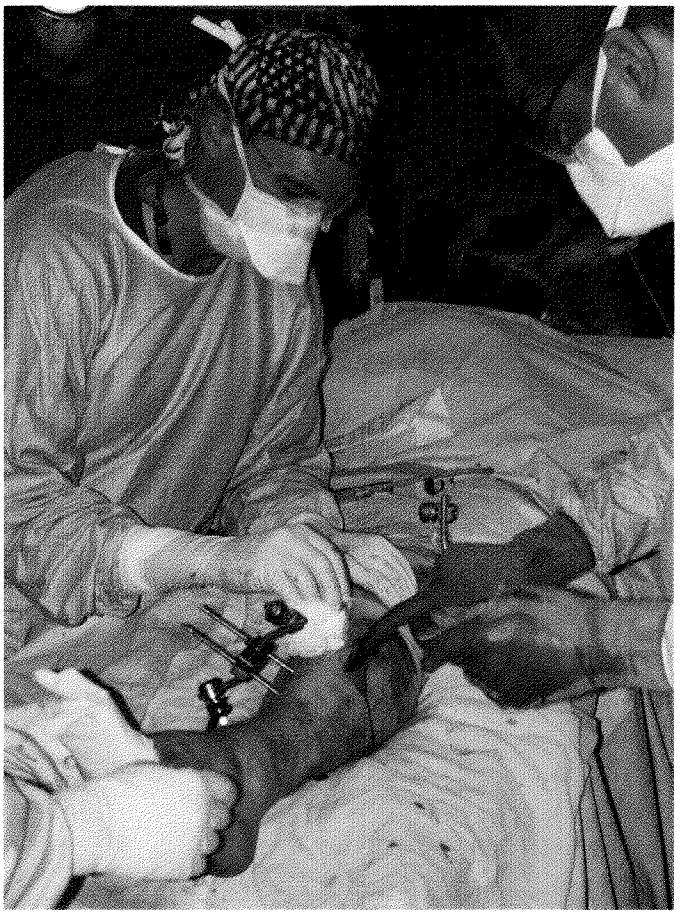
Later, inspection of the crater and other factors suggested the round was more likely a mortar. Probably launched by those characters whose south sides Josh Farley saw while they were fleeing north. Or perhaps by some of the other creepy crawlies the Alpha Troopers and I had been watching through the thermal sight the last two nights. The CG asked that a combat patrol check out the locale of the fleeing trucks for weapons caches or other evidence that it might be a site in need of further watching.

Hot Nights for the 325

SAMAWAH, IRAQ, APRIL 2—I'm now with the infantrymen of the 325th regiment of the 82nd. The 2nd Battalion has taken up residence in what used to be a barracks of the Iraqi army. The compound is a ruin, but it's surrounded by a wall, the buildings have roofs, and after a week out in the dust it seems comparatively luxurious. Unfortunately these men have no mission planned for the night, so I hop a ride on a truck full of water bottles and MREs that is headed, with armed escort, over to the Third Battalion headquarters a few kilometers away, in the city's abandoned train station. On the way we pass several M-1 tanks guarding bridges and entry points.



Field Hospital Lt. Col. George Bal and Major Mark Taylor perform surgery on a soldier of the 325th infantry who was shot in the leg. The day before, they operated on a trooper shot in the face by a ricochet. "He spit out the bullet and some teeth." Field hospital tents must be sealed to keep out desert dirt, so the temperatures soar—I estimate it was at least 130 degrees in this tent during the operation. U.S. Army doctors treat Iraqi prisoners and civilians as well as American soldiers.

Third Battalion has been doing some of the heaviest fighting in the city up to now. "Last night, when we assaulted the major bridges crossing to the north side of the Euphrates River we were involved in a really heavy firefight," a Lieutenant Bryant tells me. "Hotter than Operation Anaconda in Afghanistan, hotter than anything any U.S. forces have encountered in a lot of years. The Special Republican Guard and the paramilitaries had dug in a large number of machine guns, mortars, RPGs, weapons of all sorts, just over the bridges. Bullets were flying everywhere. We had large rounds landing 40 feet from the colonel's humvee. They really opened up on us for several hours. But we punched back and killed a large number of them, and took many prisoners."

At one point, an ambulance roared up to a Samawah check point, its lights popping and siren screaming. An infantryman fired a warning shot to bring it to a halt (just as the troops have been instructed to do), but as the ambulance screeched to a halt, four irregulars jumped out with guns blazing. Because the guard's alertness prevented the vehicle from getting closer, no soldier was killed; the gunmen were. Ambulances are also being used as couriers—for orders, arms, and fighters—so the troopers have learned to watch them suspiciously.

At about the same time, we learned that one of the holiest religious sites in Iraq was being used as a firing point up in Karbala. With each new outrage, the *fedayeen* increase the chances of drawing innocent people into the war.

Another low blow was struck that same day at a building on the east side of Samawah. It had been identified as a source of enemy fire, so one of the forward air controllers out with the troops called in an air strike. The bomber was actually overhead and about to let fly when the Iraqi fighters in the building literally ran into the street and grabbed a number of terrified women and children, dragging them into the building with them. The air drop was instantly called off, and a decision was made by U.S. commanders to leave the building alone for the moment.

Also on April 2, a large number of armed guerillas congregated in a stadium and adjoining abandoned school. Shots were exchanged. Then the 319 artillery was called in, and howitzer rounds flew fast and furious.

Earlier, an armored cavalry humvee—identical to the one I've been riding in and sleeping on for the past three days, and undoubtedly manned by the same kind of sturdy and jovial men I've encountered throughout the cavalry—was in Samawah. While rolling along a road it was blasted from behind by a rocket propelled grenade. One U.S. soldier was killed, the other two crew members injured.

A Raid Deferred

SAMAWAH TRAIN STATION—The good news is that this cavalryman was the only soldier from the 82nd Airborne killed in Samawah the entire week. A dozen have been wounded and treated at one of the impressive field hospital tents I've visited, where hardy Army doctors practice an amazingly high quality of

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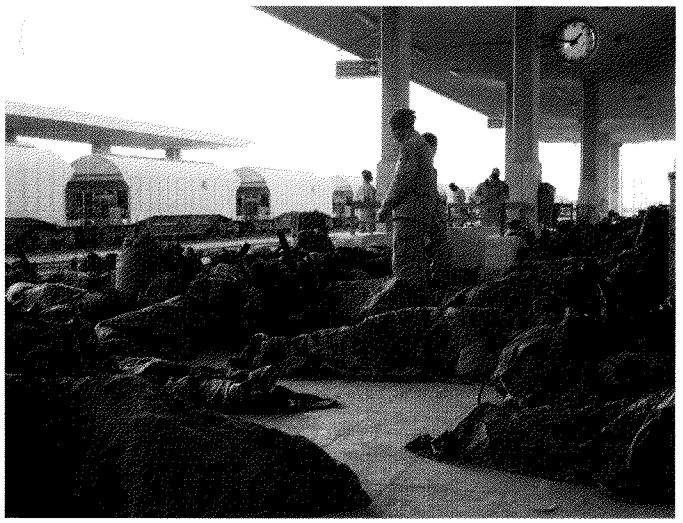

Not Picky Paratroopers from the 3rd Battalion of the 325 lay down to sleep on the dusty platform of the Samawah train station at dawn, exhausted after a night of fighting.

medicine without benefit of running water, disinfected operating rooms, refrigeration, and so forth. The most delicate cases are of course forwarded quickly to more sophisticated hospitals aboard Navy ships or at bases in Europe. Meanwhile, an average of 15-20 enemy guerillas are being killed daily, and more taken prisoner.

I observed perhaps 50 POWs being held temporarily behind wire when I was at the brigade headquarters. Interviewers are reportedly getting some good information from them about activities of the irregulars in the city, many or even most of whom are apparently fanatics who have arrived from outside points. Not yet fully convinced they are finally free of Saddam, local residents remain tentative about cooperating openly with the American soldiers. But they are starting to believe. Last night, several Iraqis loitering along a rail bed grinned and waved at us as our column of five military vehicles passed.

The mission I came to the 3rd Battalion to observe tonight was the storming of a 400-bed hospital that the *fedayeen* have been using as a battle headquarters. This repeats the same dastardly pattern followed in Nasiriyah, where the Marines eventually had to seize a hospital that had become a guerilla command center. They uncovered not only military plans and stores, but also a large stash of gas masks and atropine injectors, intended for use by local military and political bosses in the event their field commanders unleashed a chemical attack.

Our 3rd Battalion now had the Samawah hospital cordoned away. Snipers were picking off soldiers who could be seen at the windows holding weapons. A forced entry was the next step.

But shortly after dark, the mission was cancelled—out of fear of injuring bystanders. Not knowing whether patients were inside, or how many, the assault was put on hold. The American commanders would simply put up with attacks organized out of the hospital rather than risk hurting civilians. "Like the Bible says, 'we know not the hour, we know not the day'—but we do know we are going to prevail. So we're willing to be patient to avoid hurting innocent people," Colonel Bray had explained some days earlier when describing how he would choose his fights.

So instead of joining the night-time raid, I lay down in an empty porter's room within the ruined Samawah train station. A flea-bitten old couch in one corner had long since been robbed of its seat cushions, but the back padding was still there. I kicked the frame apart and settled on my first cushioning in weeks.

Strangely, I slept much worse than on the truck hood. Partly, it was the sounds of combat roaring around me. Shortly after I lay down, the whining tremors of a long column of tanks and armored personnel carriers drew near, eventually passing just on the other side of the tracks from the train platform where I lay. Then at 21:55 the mortars outside the front door of the station began to fire heavily on some target, joined by a second artillery battery somewhere close at hand. After perhaps 15 minutes the barrage stopped, bringing a stupefying silence.

At some point in the black night there was a tremendous explosion very near by, which I less heard than felt in my throat and genitals. I lay wondering: An ammunition cache going up? An incoming shell? Who knows? No one stirred in other parts of the station, so I rolled over; just one more bit of wartime din.

Then a few hours before dawn, the troopers who had been pre-positioned for the cancelled raid poured into our station in a soft glow of green chem lights and the clanking of a hundred rifles and rucksacks. Within minutes, most had laid down on the concrete train siding, curled against their packs and ponchos and each other, and fallen sound asleep. Amid the '40s-era rail cars parked beside them, and under the vintage platform clock frozen in time above them, they resembled generations of grunts from the conductor-and-locomotive era.

Giving up on sleep myself, I splashed some water on my face and opened a Murray (as soldiers sometimes call MREs). One trooper had rescued from a garbage heap an eight-inch pup of the mangy curs that wander much of Iraq. As I sat on a broken marble step it repeatedly tried to nose into my breakfast. This dog deserved a cuff. Somehow, though, I couldn't bring myself to slap it.

Final Assault

Baghdad Dress Rehearsal

BACK AT THE SAMAWAH IRAQI ARMY BARRACKS, APRIL 3—Some of what the men of the 325th Regiment have been doing this week is basic infantry blocking and tackling, but much of it is the more delicate and tricky work of urban warfare—clearing intersections and buildings, taking and holding bridges, draining sniper's nests, smashing mortar and machine gun sites hidden in residential neighborhoods. To date, this has been done with extraordinary success, measured by the enemy-to-friendly kill rate.

In the first war with Iraq, Kuwait was liberated and most of the Iraqi military destroyed at a cost of 148 Americans killed, and 458 wounded. Those are extraordinarily light losses for the work accomplished. But of course that was basically a desert

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Paving the Way Howitzers were used to soften up bunkers, mortar sites, and machine gun nests before the infantry assaults at Samawah.

tank war that was halted short of cities like Samawah and Baghdad. Guerilla street fighting can be a great equalizer, and there is a rule of thumb that any force battling its way into a city can expect casualties of up to a third.

When down the road in Nasiriyah the Marines carried out operations similar to those now taking place in Samawah, they got stung, taking many more casualties than have so far accumulated here. Was the resistance fiercer? Are the Samawah tactics better? Is the 82nd doing something especially well?

The 82nd has always claimed a special expertise in urban warfare. "You've got to understand, every officer in this division closely studies the classic urban battles, from the Israeli case histories right back to Stalingrad," states Lieutenant Barbato when I ask about this. "We train all the time for clearing airport terminals and other public spaces. So we're ready for this."

It occurs to me that the 82nd's sweep of Samawah may very well be the dress rehearsal for a final performance of the same script, on a larger scale, in Baghdad. If Iraq's capital can be pacified with the same minimal losses of life that have so far occurred here, it will be an enormous accomplishment. Those urban warfare textbooks will have to be revised, and the men of the 82nd will be writing history as well as reading it.

Time will tell.

I got wind that the climactic raid of the 82nd Airborne's liberation of Samawah will take place starting around midnight tonight, and culminating in an infantry assault across the bridges spanning the Euphrates. The dense north side of the river—the stronghold of the guerillas who had poured withering fire onto the 325 during the first push to take the bridges a couple days earlier—will now be frontally attacked and occupied.

This time the 3rd Battalion, which has borne much of the infantry work to date, is going to rest and regroup. The assault will be conducted by the 1st and 2nd Battalions, which is why I've jumped a supply convoy back to the headquarters of the 2nd.

The men will be immediately preceded over the bridges by Bradleys and other armored vehicles from the 41st Infantry Regiment, assigned to support the 82nd here. In addition, the 82nd's artillery, plus AC-130 gunships, will bombard the riverfront bunkers and buildings where many of the machine guns, mortars, and RPG firing positions are dug in. And Apache and Kiowa helicopters will be in the air with us, armed with missiles, rockets, and machine guns.

That is all any foot soldier could ever hope for. But the final responsibility for sweeping the streets and cleaning out the buildings—one room at a time—is going to fall on men working the old-fashioned way: with rifles, pistols, and knives.

Toy Soldiers

Just before any grassroots infantry assault takes place, U.S. Army units always run what is called a "rock drill." This is a kind of low-tech war game, where enemy and friendly forces are laid out on the floor of a tent or building, along with symbols for landmarks, roads, and geographical features. Then company and platoon commanders walk through the battle plan, deciding the nitty gritty of who will attack which objective, from what direction, with what lines of fire, and so on.

The "rock drill" name comes from the fact that these are traditionally staged using stones, sticks, sand—whatever the fighters can lay their hands on at the battlefield. In our case, the 3-D scenario was set up in one room of the commandered Iraqi army barracks where we were squatting, using bricks, cardboard cut from boxes, fabric curtain strips to represent roads, and chunks of foam sliced off mattresses. Parachute cord tied to water bottles delineated the map grid lines that would show up on each platoon's GPS position locator. Critical buildings that needed to be seized were code-named for U.S. Presidents. Vital roads and alleys were given titles of different automobiles. Duct tape indicated the location of trenches through which the *fedayeen* would flow to the battle zone. In addition, a couple dozen blown-up aerial maps of the neighborhood were distributed to squad leaders—quite a short-order feat in these squalid surroundings, accomplished with portable generators and wide-format printers hooked to laptop computers holding various defense intelligence topo maps on their hard drives.

Time was tight. The stakes were high. At 17:00, 20 mostly young commanders and squad leaders clustered around the floor map in a sweaty circle. The tone was hard, the language brutal, the pace racing.

It had been learned that Karim Hamdany, a member of Saddam Hussein's inner circle and a four-star uniformed general in the Republican Guard, had come down from Baghdad to organize the local resistance. Street intersections had been built up with fighting positions. Machine gun nests were dug in and sandbagged in many locations. RPGs and ammunition were stashed in scores of buildings across the northern neighborhoods.

Guerillas would be secreted among innocent townspeople, whom they would use for cover. "This town is about to turn," explained the operations officer. "Lots of people are excited.

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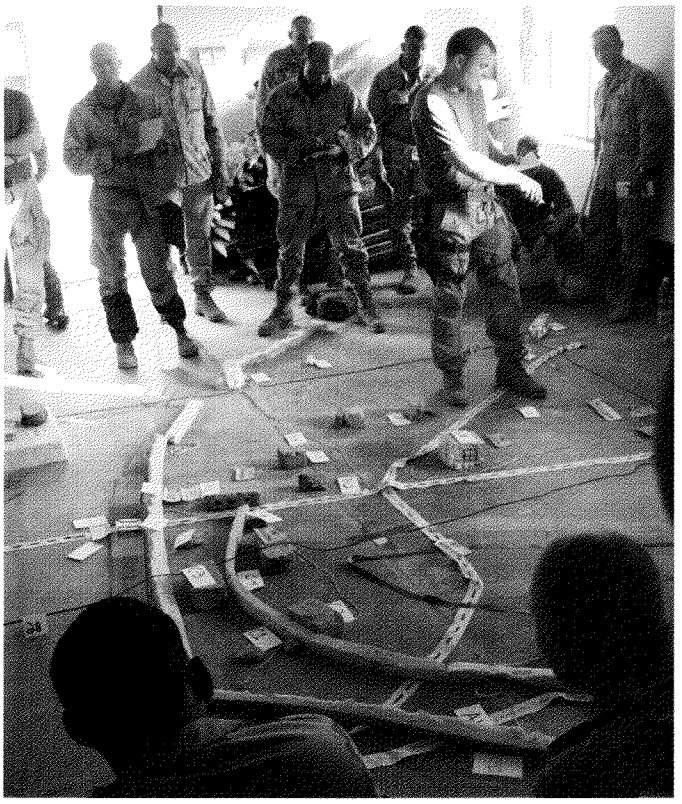
We've got friendly locals waving at and approaching our patrols now. But this actually causes problems, because the irregulars mix in with them to get close, then drop a grenade or an RPG onto a humvee. This is a dangerous phase. We've got PsyOp teams broadcasting on the streets now, telling people that the coalition forces are conducting risky operations and that they need to stay in their homes to be safe. We'll keep putting out that message, and for now anyone who approaches you has to be considered a potential enemy. Be on guard at all times."

Hotspots, choke points, and problem buildings are identified. Decisions are made on which squads should attack each. Snipers are assigned positions on high buildings. There is heavy emphasis on the rules of engagement, on fields of fire and physical operational limits, all of which are carefully calibrated to avoid fratricide or collateral civilian damage.

The infantry will mount open stake trucks starting around



Rock Drill Infantry commanders from the 2nd Battalion of the 325 plan details of their raid on Samawah guerillas, using materials at hand to mock up buildings, roads, trenches, and river.

22:30 tonight. The vehicles will drive under blackout conditions to a location a few kilometers from the attack zone. Troopers will then dismount and silently walk the remaining distance using their night vision goggles. Just before dawn there will be a 300 meter sprint across a metal bridge, with the assault to begin immediately upon reaching the north bank of the Euphrates River.

Second Battalion's Charlie Company will spearhead the fight. Alpha and Bravo Company will work on the right and left flanks. And the Delta Company troopers in humvees with Mark 19s and other heavy roof-mounted guns will provide cover and engage any heavy enemy weapons or "technicals" that pop up. ("Technical" is the military term for a civilian vehicle that has been modified into a mobile gun truck.) I'm going in with Charlie Company.

Building A Bonfire

After the rock drill, commanders go back to their companies and platoons and brief them on their assignments. The battle plan rapidly trickles down to each part of the fighting machine. Squads working with flashlights and headlamps hash out details and rehearse movements.

Then a yellow glow begins to build in a barracks courtyard. This is unusual. We have operated, necessarily, under strict light discipline during our whole time in Iraq, with either no night illumination allowed, or just red or green pinlights. The glow is fast becoming an orange-red roar, toward which we all instinctively begin to shift. As a captain pushes past me I hear him murmur, "Holy shit, I ask five privates to build me a campfire and this is what I get!"

A giant pyre now rages, fueled by several foam mattresses some enthusiastic young pyromaniacs have tossed into the flames. In a land of wood, this bonfire would be a terror. But Iraq is not a land of wood; it is a land of dust and sand and broken concrete.

Charlie Company is ordered to fall in. Painted red by firelight and ferocity, 120 men form in neat ranks. "At ease men. Gather around me," barks Captain Adam Carson. Carson has been company commander for one year and three months. He saw his first combat three days earlier. But he is prepared.

"You," he pauses for emphasis, "are all part of history. After that nasty firefight at the bridges two days ago, you have already seen more combat than any unit of the 82nd Airborne since the 1960s. Now we're going to finish that job.

"I need guys who can hit targets. I need guys who will do anything to protect their buddies. I need guys who are ready to kill.

"Unlike last time, we're going in tonight with some armor. And Apaches. And with Delta Company. I'm gonna be damn glad to have the Delta boys with us. We're gonna need them. But gun trucks stand out. They can get cornered on tight city streets. They're a juicy target for an RPG.

"If one of those trucks get hit, I want you to treat it like a damn downed helicopter. I want you to run to that vehicle and get everybody out. We're not leaving anybody behind, understand?

"And I want you to remember something. You are Americans. Americans don't shoot women and children. They don't kill soldiers who have surrendered. That what the assholes we're up against do. That's what we're fighting. We're gonna do things differently.

"But if your life is in danger, you shoot. And you shoot to kill."

A quiet burst of "hoo-ah"—the airborne cry of enthusiasm and seriousness—rises from the circle of men.

The commander ends by reading Psalm 144, with its tribute to those who battle against unrighteousness. "How's everyone feeling?"

Instantly, a roaring "HOO-AH" surges from 120 throats.

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Crackshot

After being dismissed, the soldiers wolf down some quick food and as much water as they can drink, then find a corner where they can stretch out in the dust for a little sleep. Most troopers remain amazingly loose. I ask one soldier if I can perch on a comfortable ledge next to him. "Roger," he answers. "It's a free country. Or at least it's fixing to be."

I eventually settle my backpack next to Sergeant Patrick Duhon, a proud Cajun from Abbeville, Louisiana and Sergeant Chad Meggison a radio operator from Waverly, Illinois. We're joined by Air Force Sergeant Donnavon Huss, one of about 40 forward air controllers assigned to accompany the various field commanders of the 82nd Airborne to call in air strikes from the F-15s, Tomcats, and myriad other aircraft circling invisibly overhead most of the day and night.

Night Vision This infrared photo shows a 2nd Battalion paratrooper scanning the horizon for threats in his night vision goggles during the silent march into the heart of Samawah.

"Old Hollywood was in his element tonight, huh?" suggests Duhon, using Captain Carson's universal nickname. "Yeah, he did all right," the others agree quietly. This is a flinty trio, not easily impressed. They are veteran fighters with experience in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and many points in between.

Huss shows me the black laser illuminator he uses to guide bombs dropped from miles above the earth onto targets as precisely as a dentist puts in a filling. The size and shape of a common flashlight, and powered by just four AA batteries, the laser can inscribe a brilliant spot on a building a mile away. The light is of a frequency invisible to humans not wearing NODs, but the pointer will blind anyone it hits in the eyes, so we scan the horizon carefully with his goggles before he lets me play at marking a distant water tower with the device.

The banter among the sergeants turns to an amazing shot made a day or two earlier by a sniper with the 2nd Battalion, Specialist Stewart. The group had been tasked to seize the Samawah water treatment plant. While perched on a high tower on a nearly moonless night, Stewart scoped, all the way across the city, the silhouette of a man with an RPG strapped to his back. The man was moving on the roof of a building, and visible only in flickering outline. Using a .50 caliber rifle in the seated position, Stewart lined up his shot. Duhon, Meggison, and Huss watched him squeeze the trigger.

Even with the high muzzle velocity of the .50 cal, it took more than two full seconds after the gun fired before the bullet arrived at its target. Suddenly, the guerilla slumped and rolled off his building. Stunned, the sergeants checked the grid locations. A 1,440 meter rifle shot—a colossal achievement that got Stewart written up the next day for a medal nomination.

"Man, you might as well call that a one-mile plug," suggested one of the men.

"Until that moment, the most amazing shot I ever saw was one taken by my daddy. We live in a rural area, all surrounded by fields, and my dad looked out a bathroom window and saw a coyote trotting up a hillside. He let out a holler and ran for his Browning. I followed him out into the yard. Almost immediately the coyote got wind of us and started to hauling. That coyote was at a dead run when dad let fly. Lord, that dog flipped in the air three times before he landed. We walked it off: 500 paces. My dad can shoot."

Phantasm

Evening, April 3-Soon, men have settled themselves quietly on the ground in a handful of pods. Only the radio operators and a few others are still finetuning their equipment. For most, weapons have long since been cleaned and loaded, magazines stacked, canteens filled. Several soldiers are privately writing things by pinlight. I think I know what. Heavy breaths and scattered snoring mark the lucky men.

The early night soon grows phantasmagoric. In the dark overhead, a sonic catalogue of various aircraft noises rapidly builds. A few miles off, bombs begin to pop, and missiles whir. The light show reaches a peak when the 105 mm cannon of an AC-130—a kind of tank, Bradley, and gun truck all in one flying package—begins to rip.

In a circle all around our camp, the infernal hounds of Iraq begin their horrible yipping, choking, yowling barks. Some squeal as if caught in the jaws of some other dog; perhaps they are. The wheezing and gas-passing of the men increases. Some of the dreamers are ejaculating names and bizarre fragments of phrases in their disturbed somnolence.

The burning foam mattresses, which seemed such a bold stroke an hour ago, are now just a source of reeking stink. "That smell is gonna kill me," someone mutters. Now the artillery, very nearby, follows the Air Force into explosive action. The dog howling crescendos. I find myself fantasizing that Sergeant Huss has called in an airstrike to silence their aggressive mawing. A B-52 carpet-bombing to restore the audial peace.

Then everything outside the city goes quiet. In the fresh silence I begin to detect a new sound: the clanking creak of tank treads. The armored vehicles of the 41st are now moving into the lair of the Samawah guerillas. These are gentler, more distant sounds. But they do not relent.

The hours crawl. Finally, hands are shaking men awake.

Murphy vs. Fudge

As we shed our grogginess, the radios crackle a new installment in the ancient tale of Army bureaucracy. Someone has screwed up. A group of the trucks needed to transport 500 soldiers were sent to a wrong grid. No one knows where they are now.

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Toast This "technical"—a civilian vehicle with a large gun mounted on back by irregular forces—was destroyed by either a bomber or a Bradley fighting vehicle before soldiers reached it on foot.

Meanwhile other trucks were sent out with no sides on them. Heavily laden paratroopers can't perch on the flat bed of a high-mobility truck rocking and rolling over off-road obstacles. The abidingly cynical belief that many soldiers have in the power of Murphy's Law (If something can go wrong, it will) now kicked into high gear.

"What a joke. This is like freakin' leg land," spluttered the company commander. "Here we are the 82nd Airborne, the most deployable unit in the U.S. military, an elite outfit that prides itself on being able to throw thousands of guys and tons of vehicles out of airplanes anywhere in the world within hours, and we can't get 40 frigging trucks organized on a full day's notice! The friggin' GACs [truck convoys] are *always* the weak link. I told you it'd turn into a goat f--k." He stops pacing and turns to me. "And you can quote me on that."

Fortunately, the night is rescued by another ancient Army tradition—the fudge factor. The original plan had everyone piling into trucks way too early anyway, so there turns out to be plenty of time to track down the wayward vehicles, refit those without sides, and commandeer some from elsewhere.

As the only person in the horde without NODs, I am desperately trying to hang with the Charlie Company radio operators during the mob movement to the trucks. I fail. I run into a trooper who asks where I'm from, and when I tell him upstate New York he says he's a Cornell graduate. What the hell, I'll join his group; and so I end up with the Charlie mortar team. We all clamber seven feet up some ladders and flop ourselves, laden with body armor, water, weapons and ammo (for the soldiers) and photo equipment (for me), over tailgates.

"The last part of the trip, we're going to be off the hardball [paved road], and cuttin' cross country over a dicey stretch," warns the convoy master on the radio. He urges the drivers, who will be navigating with night vision goggles, which is tricky, to proceed slowly to avoid rollovers. He warns troopers to hang on tight, and not to be surprised if we take fire entering the city limits. The soldiers remain wondrously cool. Quite bold. And amusing.

Comedy Night

Even with the trucking foibles, it turns out that in order to make the dawn attack timing work, we have to sit in our switched-off vehicles about an hour before departing. This turns out to be, without question, the most amusing hour of my life. Sitting in pitch darkness, well into the hallucinatory hours of the night, crammed together like sardines, and in a highly reflective mood, the sardonic potential was there right from the get-go.

Soon, splashing sounds could be heard. "Hey buddy, your truck is leaking," hollered someone. Before long bladders were venting all around us, in eight foot streams over the side rails.

"I kinda want to smoke a cigarette," complains one soldier wryly, as he sits next to Lieutenant Ney. "And then again, Israeli statistics show that 80 percent of night-time sniper hits are to the faces of smokers, and I sure don't want to get shot in the face by an Iraqi. Then again, we know Iraqi snipers have very bad aim. But then again, I don't want to get Lieutenant Ney shot in the face."

There is some extended riffing about MREs. "My favorite variety is Restroom Rice and Beans," drawled one soldier, kicking off several minutes of foul word play on the names of the dishes printed on each container.

"One of the funniest things this whole damn deployment was watching those POWs eat MREs."

"Yeah, I had to 'bout jump to keep one guy from eating the 'anti-spoilage dry pak' inside a pop tarts wrapper."

"And I thought you was trying to kill that one prisoner, in direct violation of the Geneva Convention, when you gave him that fudge brownie without any water to drink."

"Yeah, those things are tough as woodpecker lips."

"Man, my wife's birthday is coming up. When I was deployed in Egypt I missed it, and, I'll tell you what, she has never let me forget that to this day. So I don't care if I have to personally pillage one of Saddam's palaces, I am not going to leave this godforsaken country until I have begged, bought, or stolen something very flashy for my girl."

"Yeah, well I got the opposite problem. My wife is always mailing me all this crap I can't use and can't carry, teddy bears and dumb ass stuff like that. When I was in Bosnia, I just gave it all away to Albanians."

(Interjected from across the truck: "I bet a nickel some of them ate the stuffed animals.")

"Anyway, when I come home my wife wants to know, all shocked, where all this heartwarming memorabilia has got to, and why I weren't huggin' it close to my chest all the way across the Atlantic Ocean. So now I'm afraid to dump anything, or I'll catch it. I'm goin' have to tell her: If I can't eat it, or wash with it, or use it, don't send it. If it's fuzzy, *definitely* don't send it."

"I had a little fun with my wife just before we left our e-mail back in Kuwait. I sent her a digital photo of some sorry donkey shack. Told her I was in Iraq, and real impressed with the country, and that prices on real estate were awful reasonable right

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now, given the war and all. Said I'd signed papers for this little country place—needs a bit of work—using half our savings. True, it's a 2,500 mile commute to work, but I'll be retiring from the military someday, and then she and I can fix the place up."

"Buddy, I hope you've got a truly loving wife."

"You know what's startin' up about now back home? High school baseball. Boy, I miss that."

"I tried to get a baseball team going at Fort Bragg, but—get this—they told me it was too dangerous. I'm thinking: Wait a minute. Here we are in the Army. Jumping out of airplanes. Shooting at each other. And baseball is too dangerous?"

"Yup, I miss baseball too. The outfield boundary at my little old high school was danged barbed wire. And cows on the other side. If a game came up and your arm was too sore to pitch, you'd go out that night and drop the wire, and next mornin' there'd be cowpies all over the infield. Game'd get rescheduled, and you could be ready."

"How big was your high school?"

"Graduating class of 36."

"Yeah, my graduating class was 28. And several of them were charity cases."

"Mine was 42. I guess that makes me a big city boy in this group."

"Well, I'm sure my high school baseball team is going to stink this year, because there were only 14 seniors in the school."

"That's all right. Hey, that's big. My senior class was eight. I French-kissed 75 percent of the senior class girls before I graduated, and 66 percent of the girls in the junior class."

"Why sergeant, I didn't realize you were home schooled."

"Don't you mess with me private. I'm a dangerous man, and currently armed to the teeth."

Gruff Intimacy

At about this time, Sergeant Doak began singing softly over the radio. "Sgt. Doak's Country Convoy Song," with custom lyrics set to the tune of "Ring of Fire."

"My truck's on fire…
Oooh, my, my,
Yes, my truck's on fire…
And my legs are both asleep…"

Someone rips the sergeant for his lame rhyming. Someone else criticizes his grammar. "You're absolutely right, son," comes an answer, "we simply cannot tolerate a person using incorrect English while heading off to blow things up."

And on and on. I've never witnessed a moment in time more spontaneously, morbidly, and fiercely funny. I couldn't write fast enough in the dark to capture more than just a fragment of the hilarious banter.

Despite—or perhaps because of—the certainty of gunfire before morning, everyone was "loose as a scrotum in an August overall," as one trooper put it. These men really opened up (in the ways that gruff males do). There was enormous affection and love in the air: love of family, love of home communities and regions of the country, love of the outdoors, love of freedom, love of each other.

Find Cover Paratroopers run for cover as others peer into a courtyard about to be assaulted during the April 4 raid into Samawah.

Cigarettes were quietly passed back and forth between seatmates. Water bottles were shared. Soldiers automatically, wordlessly, hand a portion of whatever they have to others around them. Preparing for and facing battle, I believe, deepens portions of the soldier's soul, encouraging forms of generosity, empathy, mutual respect, and friendship as no other occupation can.

Outsiders have no idea how much intimacy and deep comradeship exists between fighting men. Direct reliance on each other for their very survival encourages blunt openness and genuine familial spirit. If there is a corner of modern life where boundaries between men (like race and economics) melt away more completely than in the military, I have never seen it.

Going In

Center City Samawah, April 4—At 02:15 in the morning we finally roll out of camp. Instantly, the mood turns sober, and all business. Four troopers on each side of the truck pull security—facing outward, their rifles pointed over the siderails, staring into the gloam with their night goggles to search for threats. A SAW gunner is placed at the tailgate.

When his sergeant notices the machine gunner starting to drowse he jumps on him: "Morton, you asleep?"

A slow and unconvincing "No" comes back.

"Because if I look down at you and find you're asleep," the sergeant whispers fiercely, "I'm gonna shove my foot so far up your ass you're gonna have to swallow to get it back down your throat. We're in a hot zone. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sarge!"

Murphy is still lurking. The convoy route is a bushwhack chosen to snake us toward the town center while mostly avoid-

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ing population centers, and the scout team has marked the turns only with faint chemical lights laying on the ground. Driving in the total blackout, several trucks pass one turnoff before realizing they're lost. Fortunately they're able to turn around and rejoin the main column. A little further down the road, however, one of the top-heavy five-ton trucks cuts a corner too tightly and rolls down an incline. Miraculously, nobody's hurt. We grind on, abandoning the vehicle.

At 03:45 we de-truck. The pre-assault fire from the air and the howitzers is culminating. We see fiery red darts in the sky above us that mean there is an Apache helicopter up there loosing rockets. Then, suddenly, all falls silent.

At 04:35 we start to creep into the heart of Samawah, guns ready, NODs on. Goggleless, I stick like a shadow to one bulky sergeant in the mortars group to avoid getting separated or falling into a hole. Thirty minutes later we reach our bridge. There is just enough dawning light now to see without goggles. We start to run.

The air suppression has worked, the company takes no fire on the bridge. We pour over the embankment on the other side and the lead squads fan out, kicking in the first doors and windows, climbing onto roofs.

Immediately, the shooting and explosions start. The mortar man next to me drops the heavy base of his tube. I stoop and pick it up and we run forward together, past a pickup with a large gun mounted on its bed, already charred black by some American soldier or pilot, until the sergeant screams "Set up there!" Readings are immediately taken and fed into the handheld firing computer, and trajectory angles are shouted to the teams at the two tubes. In about three minutes, they are ready for firing.

Smoking the Fedayeen Fighting rages around some soldiers who have just cleared a building where they found a stash of rocket propelled grenades.

There is shouting and gunfire directly in front of us.

"Enemy!"

"West building!"

"Taking fire!"

"Hit him! That bastard needs to die!"

A boom of C4 plastic explosive, and another door is down. Very quickly, several rooms and then several buildings right at the base of the bridge have been cleared. They are spray-painted with a large orange "C" to tell soldiers following that they contain no enemy.

Bent over double, the vanguard elements race to the next building, and then the next. New companies move in behind us. The fan spreads, fluttering only where soldiers pause to dodge bullet sprays and RPG explosions.

Block By Block

I run, and duck, and take notes, and shoot photographs as light allows. Troopers speak to me several times during the morning. "You're crazy man!" "What'cha doing this for?" Who made you come here, dude?"

A hole is blown in the wall of one large building which looks like a school. It takes perhaps a half hour to clear the structure of fighters. One of the Delta gun trucks blazes away with its Mark 19 grenade launcher to finish the job.

Further down the street, we enter what looks like it might have been a mosque. The defenders have fled. Several ominous-looking RPGs they left behind are lying on the ground floor.

As the lead platoons split up and head in separate directions at successive intersections, the soldiers diffuse to the point where squads of just a half-dozen or dozen find themselves working alone over several blocks. I have ended up with a group of about 10 men from Bravo Company who cut behind the mosque into a residential district near the river.

The alleys are narrow, and dark windows and doors threaten from every direction. The squad clings to opposite sides of the street, scanning the rooftops and windows through gun sights as they work their way toward the river. A machine gunner is posted at each intersection to provide backside security. Gradually, the troopers clear out critical buildings.

First the door is pounded on. If no one opens right away, the lock is blown off with a shotgun, or the door is blasted open with C4. Then each room is swept at riflepoint. Most structures seem empty, but some have young men or families in them, who are gathered up for relocation to a safer spot, or in some cases questioning.

Nearby booms and machine gun bursts can be heard as adjoining squads encounter fire. Thick smoke begins to rise in several parts of the neighborhood. At one point there is a loud exchange of automatic fire and grenades very close by. The soldier carrying the platoon's shotgun sidles up to me, holding it in an outstretched hand, his M-4 hanging by his side. "Do you know how to use this?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well if this shit gets any hotter I'm gonna give it to you. You just look for me, pal."

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Sniper

We are starting to work along the Euphrates riverfront when the radio brings an order to secure access to a pontoon bridge which straddles the river nearby. The squad's machine gun is set up behind some sandbags along the embankment wall. The captain tells some soldiers to enter a building which is the highest on the block so they can climb onto its roof and establish a lookout.

They start to kick in the door when a quavery voice sings out in excellent English, "I am coming out! I'm a doctor at the hospital and I am coming out!" A very sweaty and shaky man in his mid 30s steps out with his hands up. "My family is inside." The squad brings out his wife and three children between 2 and 10.

"Sir, the coalition forces need access to your house to secure this area," explains the captain. Nothing will be touched, but you must leave the area now. Please gather some things."

A few minutes later, the family is standing on the sidewalk with bag in hand, and plans are being made to transport them to a holding area. Suddenly, automatic fire rings out from a building across the river. We dive for cover. The family is hustled behind a steel newsstand on the street corner.

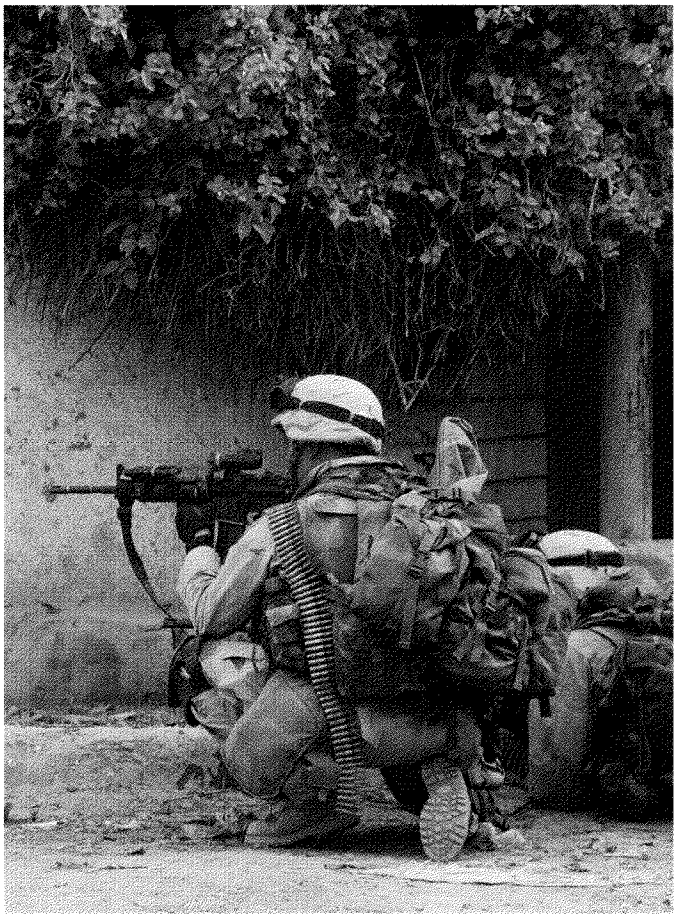
A few minutes later the sniper begins shooting again. "Which window? Where's it coming from?" scream several officers. "Look for the muzzle flash!" Opposite us on the south bank is an entire block of four-story buildings, perhaps a hundred windows and myriad roofs where a gunman could set up. Every few minutes our invisible assailant lets loose again. We are pinned.

A message is radioed, and perhaps 20 minutes later we spot a platoon of soldiers from the 325 trotting down the south bank to surround the buildings opposite. They will search each floor. There is a lot of real estate to cover, and continued sporadic shooting keeps us mostly locked in place for the next two or three hours.

During this period, we get a radio warning that a busload of *fedayeen* were hustled into the neighborhood a little earlier. As we're digesting this, several vehicles try to rush the farther of the two bridges we are guarding. "What should I do?" screams the machine gunner. "Open up! Now!" Tracers from the .50 cal and smoke trails from the RPG launcher arch a couple hundred meters to the bridge. A taxi and two small pickups keep rolling across and out of sight, with unknown effect on the occupants.

Elsewhere in the city, several other technical vehicles get lit up this day. As I watch from about three blocks away, two of the 82nd's Kiowas fly in low and hard, then pull up sharply in a kind of looping attack mode. They put missiles on two taxis being used by guerillas, then one circles back for a second shot.

On another bridge, a propane truck that had been wired to blow tries to crash into U.S. troops. Fortunately, they shoot it into fiery oblivion part way over. In one of the weirdest attacks, a Bravo Company platoon working in the same neighborhood as the Bravo soldiers I ended up with spotted a man pushing an unusual wheelbarrow. This seemed odd in a war zone, so they went to check it out. As the wheelbarrow turned toward them, a man crouching inside opened up with an AK-47. Both guerillas paid with their lives.



Street Fighting Soldiers from a Bravo Company platoon I accompanied as the assault progressed cleared several blocks, one building and one street at a time. Here a machine gunner and rifleman provide rear security.

That same day, some guerillas ambushed the supply convoy I regularly rode back and forth between the 2nd and 3rd Battallions. Sergeant Burgos, riding on the passenger side of a truck, was shot. The bullet caught him under the arm, just missing the supplemental hard plate on his body armor, and entered his chest. The soft portion of his armor slowed the bullet, however, and it didn't penetrate deeply enough to threaten his life. Just the night before he had been joking that there was one medal he never wanted to win, and that was the Purple Heart. He'll have one anyway.

Template For Up-River?

The radio reports that Bravo's 3rd Platoon has found a huge ammo cache. Among many other types of ordnance it contains 2,000 boxes of AK-47 rounds. That's 200,000 bullets. They are eventually dumped into a deep waste-oil cistern in an industrial zone. (More often, newly discovered caches are exploded in place by the Army's EOD specialists, creating spectacular little mushroom clouds across the city throughout the day.) I later find out that the day's total weapons haul also includes a number of 10' long missiles, 450 RPGs, and 700 grenades.

Meanwhile, the doctor has proven very personable and helpful. In speaking of the *fedayeen* he refers to them as "the criminals," and

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reports that they are mostly not locals but recent arrivals from either Baghdad or overseas seedbeds of Islamic fundamentalism. As the day passes, there are signs of support and even jubilation from some residents of the neighborhood. A large number of men gather under a covered arcade directly across the river from the bridge we are guarding, and many of them are waving and clapping, as well as pointing warning signs to certain buildings and windows.

Overall, the day is a great success. The heart of the city and the center of the *fedayeen* resistance have now been penetrated. Five uniformed Iraqi soldiers have been taken prisoner, plus one *fedayeen* thought to be Syrian. And the raid produced only three U.S. casualties—all non-life-threatening wounds from mortar shrapnel. It will take the 82nd a while to fully pacify and stabilize Samawah, but with the Baath Party's back broken, the local Shia population, which hates Saddam, is likely to do much of the final rooting out of local guerillas.

In a couple weeks of fighting, the 82nd has liberated one of Iraq's major cities, with few innocent Iraqis killed, and relatively little damage done to the city's physical infrastructure (such as it is—most of Iraq was a ruin long before the war thanks to Saddam's dastardly misrule).

Most importantly, a military template has been established. While the Samawah fighting has been exhausting, dirty, and dangerous for the brave soldiers and pilots of the 82nd, the battle has come to fruition with considerably less bloodshed than in other Iraqi cities. The operation hasn't been anything like as deadly as either military history or basic logic would lead one to expect for a large urban sweep.

The remarkable fact is that, with the military phase of the campaign approaching its close, and the next phase of humanitarian relief about to kick into gear, only one American has lost his life in the liberation of Samawah. About 15 others from the 82nd Airborne have been wounded. If this dramatic success can be replicated by American forces in Baghdad, a priceless formula for avoiding nightmarish street casualties will have been discovered, and Americans and Iraqis alike will have reason to rejoice.

The Sacred Profanity Of War

Bassan

Late Afternoon April 4—This is, however, a war. And war always includes tragedy.

The Iraqi doctor's house is searched for weapons or indications of Baath Party connections. None are found, so it is decided to let him and his family remain in their home provided they promise to stay indoors and allow U.S. troops occasional access. The doctor agrees and the platoon splits, half remaining to guard the bridge, and half heading down an adjoining alley. We have travelled barely 50 meters when we stumble upon war's cruelest face.

A boy about ten years of age is lying on a soiled mattress pad in a hideous alley. He was caught in the morning's fighting, and his clothing, arms, legs, and face are soaked in blood. On every inch of his body the flies are so thick he looks more black than brown. Across his middle is a crude bandage. We shout for Doc, the platoon's medic, who comes at a run.

While I wave my arms to dislodge some of the flies, Doc cuts off the boy's clothes and the bandage, which was fashioned by a neighbor. What we see underneath is gruesome. A grotesque gash the size of a dinner plate has taken off much of the flesh on the boy's left side, from the hip up to his rib cage. His internal organs are visible through the gaping hole in his torso.

"Oh man, this kid is hurt bad," Doc mutters, beads of sweat breaking out on is brow. He dons gloves and applies a large compress to the wound. I ask the neighbor the boy's name. It is Bassan.

Suddenly Bassan starts to wretch. His eyes roll. It looks like he is about to vomit. I expect a gory surge of regurgitated blood from internal bleeding. "Look at me Bassan," Doc says loudly, signaling the boy to keep eye contact. "I'm going to take care of you, but you have to stay calm and stay awake."

"This kid is shocking hard. He's gonna die soon if we can't get him somewhere better."

"The Iraqi doctor is just down the street," I blurt out. "He said he works in the hospital. Maybe he can help."

"Get him. Fast," Doc orders.

Within minutes the doctor is kneeling in the alley. For 15 minutes the American medic and Iraqi physician struggle to get an IV started. The child has had such a massive loss of blood, all of his veins have collapsed. Finally they get a bag of electrolytic fluid started in a vein of his foot.

The alley is strewn with rubbish, animal hair, food scraps, and excrement. A shallow V-shaped drainage channel down its center encloses a ribbon of vile, soupy liquid, much of it human waste poured out from adjoining homes. The muddy green trickle, but an arm's length from where Bassan lies, swarms with pestilential insects. I fan madly for half an hour in an attempt to drive away the horrid flies as they try to devour the poor child's bloody flesh.

The Cost of Hiding Fighters Among Innocents U.S. medics from the 82nd and an Iraqi doctor work to save Bassan after he has been transferred by a commandeered bus to an aid station set up in a more secure part of the city.

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The soldiers debate what can be done. Should the boy go to an Iraqi hospital? A U.S. aid station? How can he be gotten there? An American ambulance would have to have an armed escort to enter this neighborhood. It's too far to carry a litter. Eventually, an incredibly dilapidated 15-passenger minibus is commandered from a neighbor. Will the Iraqi doctor come with us? "Of course."

Bassan is gently lifted into the vehicle, and a soldier drives it to the end of the alley, where it is met by two Delta Company gun trucks for the run to the temporary aid station set up by medics in a more secure location. (Not entirely secure, however: soldiers man machine guns at each of the windows as the American medics work assiduously to treat Iraqi patients in the center of the building.)

There are no U.S. physicians here; this is only a First Aid station. But it turns out our friend the Iraqi physician is a surgeon. "Could you operate right here, right now, to stanch the boy's internal bleeding?" asks one medic after a glance at the gaping hole.

The physician hesitates visibly. "Do you have anesthesia?"

"No. But we have morphine."

"Well, I am willing to try."

The thought, however, is mind boggling. The aid station is in another filthy, dusty building. There is very little medical equipment, no running water at all. And the horrifying wound is now fouled with all sorts of contaminants.

During a quiet moment while radio calls are being made to see if a MedEvac helicopter can be located, I turn to the Iraqi doctor, with whom I have spent most of the day. I ask him his name. He measures me with a long pause. "What would you do with that information?"

"I am going to write about you in an American magazine."

"I'm sorry, but if I give my name and it becomes known to the authorities that I have been cooperating with Americans it will be very dangerous for me."

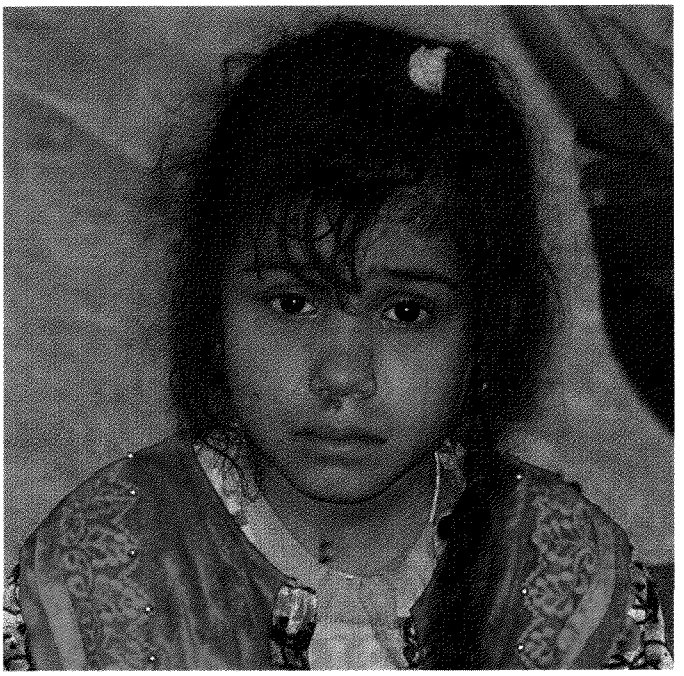
Even with 5,000 American soldiers in his city, this is another Iraqi uncertain about whether the Baath mafia are finally going to be driven out. I feel quite certain from his comments throughout the day that he would welcome a regime change engineered by the U.S. But he is unwilling to risk his life by committing to the American side until he is certain this will not be a replay of 1991, when the U.S. failed to finish off Saddam.

In a few minutes the decision is made to fly Bassan to a fully-equipped American field hospital, where surgeons can try to save his life. It seems, frankly, a long shot. But the boy is tremendously brave. He never whimpers, and even smiles up at me a few times. I'll never forget his face.

This has been a wrenching twist in an overwhelming day.

The Edge of Civilization

And Friday's drama was not yet done. The night would close for me with a tense four-truck convoy into the heart of Samawah, where the battalion headquarters had been relocated for the night. Rifles poked from every window and truck



Worth Fighting For A Samawah girl being sheltered by an American soldier personifies the deep suffering Saddam Hussein has brought down upon the heads of everyday Iraqis.

opening as we rumbled along, much later in the evening than we had intended to remain out. I was riding atop a huge pile of rucksacks in the back of a large, open stake truck.

The structure we would occupy that night was chosen because it was a sealed concrete tube with only two opposing openings that would need to be defended. Unfortunately, someone knew where we were. Just as the blacked-out convoy pulled up, we came under automatic weapons fire. An RPG whizzed through the night, detonating with a tremendous bang.

"Get out of the truck!" screamed the first sergeant at the driver and the five of us in back. I dove over the high wooden stakes that enclosed the cargo area. Unfortunately, the backpack I was wearing hung up on something. I was dangling about eight feet off the ground, like a fish flopping in the air at the end of a stringer.

I wriggled desperately but could not free myself. The firefight raged in the pitch black around me. After perhaps 15 seconds that seemed forever, I was able to rip my arms out of the straps. I fell to the ground heavily, leaving my pack snagged high on the truck. I limped into the tunnel, which we discovered was infested with rats the size of large guinea pigs. I lay down on some cardboard boxes to spend my last night in Iraq.

A few hours earlier that evening, I had had some time to reflect on events. After the all-night street combat in Samawah, and then the draining afternoon experience with Bassan, I had returned to the previous night's battalion headquarters, located at an abandoned cement plant. Whipped after 33 hours without sleep, I found an out-of-the-way office and lay down for a nap. By some sixth sense I awoke toward the end of daylight—to an eerie silence. I was alone in the building. The industrial ghost town which had been our staging grounds was suddenly almost entirely empty.

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In war, improvisation is everything, and late in the afternoon a quick decision had been made to push the command post forward, right into the parts of the city fought over that day. Within hours of when the order was given, nearly everything had been whisked away by Army worker ants. I awoke as the decamping was nearly complete.

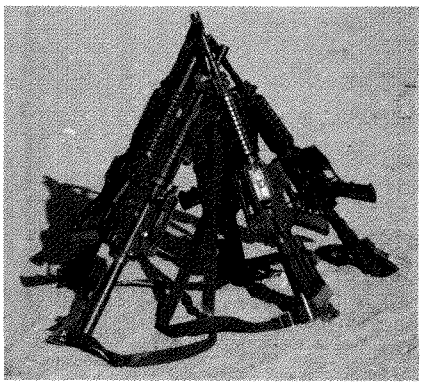
The astonishing access to events I was allowed while embedded with the 82nd had a flip side: I was responsible for my own fate. I found it possible to hustle my way into almost any battle, or planning session, or troop movement. But when I drifted off with some unit where I didn't have buddies, I knew there was no one keeping an eye out for me. That seemed fair enough. To report this story as I felt it should be, I needed that freedom, and I am not of the opinion that soldiers should have to babysit journalists. I was on my own, and knew it would be my own fault if I got into a pinch.

As it happened, I wasn't quite left behind that evening. To my great relief, I discovered that a few soldiers remained on the premises, and that one last shift of four or five trucks would be returning to haul away the remainder of the command post equipment. When they finally rolled up, the prospect of an extra body and rucksack didn't thrill the testy, sleep-deprived grunts who were jamming the final six pounds of gear into their five-pound bag. But I would've jumped on a fender to avoid being stranded in this yawning industrial hellhole, with hundreds of dark corners hard in the middle of Comanche territory.

Our wait for the final trucks was longer, and more tense, than anyone expected. For a few hours, a half dozen other men and I milled about the vast industrial warren of the darkening cement plant. As the blackness deepened, the soldiers began to nervously scan alleys and rooftops, buckle their armor and helmets, and chamber rounds in their weapons. Sentries walked out into the gloom to cover corners.

The first sergeant tried to establish a radio check. "This is Red Falcon 3. Any unit on the net that can hear this, please relay." No answer. The truck had lost the time synch that secures military transmission, or the frequency, or just line of sight. There was no radio contact. We paced uneasily as we awaited our promised mounts.

I eventually sat down next to a broken-down date palm tree, beside the chaplain—a Special Forces soldier who had retired, become a Catholic priest, then rejoined the Army as a padre. Perching somewhat incongruously on two decorous, matching white chairs that somebody had found and dragged outside, we scanned the dark outlines of the spooky twisted ruins. For perhaps 20 minutes we reclined wordlessly.



Overhead, the heavens remained crystalline. The moonless night before, I had navigated into warfare solely by the light of these stars. Now I soaked in their warm glint for a very different purpose. Over and over this month, those pure sparks had represented for me the principles that are true and unvarying in all places and at all times. They reassured me of the permanent beauty of God's world.

But down here on earth tonight, among man, all was broken, dirty, and smoke-filled. Mangy inbred dogs, their stretched teats hanging in rows, pawed through decades of accumulated refuse. A stink of burning garbage filled our noses. Nearby, an AC-130 Specter began to circle, and then to rain down steel on some adjoining snakepit, the enormous cannon throbbing at us like an invisible metronome.

I was swept yet again with a feeling of the thinness of civilization. At this moment, fine concepts like justice and fairness and mercy, as well as life itself, were only as permanent as the handful of men and few weapons and machines that stood between us and blackness, filth, and cruelty. It is an almighty strain on the soldiers bearing the burden, but Americans need to be here—because a good world is made, not found. And good men who want to build something safe and decent amidst the blackness must find other good men they can rely on for support, mutual protection, and brotherly love.

My mind returned to the words of Psalm 144, as they had echoed around our pre-combat campfire just one long night earlier.

Blessed be the Lord, my rock,
who trains my hands for war,
and my fingers for battle;
my rock and my fortress,
my stronghold and my deliverer,
my shield, in whom I take refuge,
who subdues the peoples under me....
Bow your heavens, O Lord, and come down;
touch the mountains so that they smoke.
Make the lightning flash and scatter them;
send out your arrows and rout them.
Stretch out your hand from on high;
set me free
and rescue me from the mighty waters,
from the hands of aliens,
whose mouths speak lies,
and whose right hands are false....
May our sons in their youth
be like plants full grown,
our daughters like corner pillars,
cut for the building of a palace.
May our barns be filled,
with produce of every kind....
May there be no breach in the walls,
no exile
and no cry of distress in our streets.

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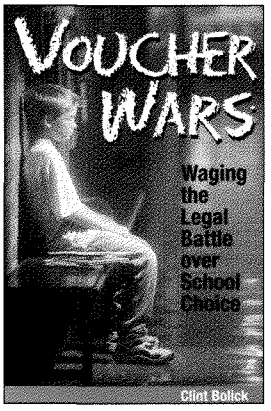
BookTalk

SCHOOLYARD BRAWL

By Naomi Schaefer

Voucher Wars: Waging the Legal Battle Over School Choice
By Clint Bolick
Cato Institute, 219 pages, $12



Javanny, my "little" from the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, just turned 13, but she can barely read at a third-grade level. Since moving here from Jamaica with her mother and sister three years ago, she has been getting mostly B's and C's on her report card, but last spring she failed every subject on the New York City-wide exam. When her mother confronted Javanny's teachers with this obvious discrepancy, they simply said that none of the other kids were passing the tests either. (Only about 10 percent of her classmates scored a proficient rating in any of the subjects.)

Through some research and a few phone calls, Javanny's mother, Marie, and I learned that President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" initiative includes money for students who are failing state and city-wide tests to receive two hours of private tutoring per week from companies like Kaplan or Princeton Review.

No sooner did Marie hand in the application for the tutoring sessions than she began receiving phone calls from various administrators in Javanny's school and bureaucrats from the district office. They would really prefer it, they explained, if she did not sign up Javanny for such a program. Javanny's own teachers, the ones who failed to teach her to read for three years, will be starting their own after-school tutoring program and would like Javanny to sign up for their program so they can get the government money.

I offer this story to illustrate three of the most important points made by lawyer Clint Bolick in his new book, *Voucher Wars*, an account of his struggle (along with that of dozens of colleagues at the Institute of Justice and other think tanks) to bring school choice to various, mostly inner-city, areas across the country. The first and most obvious point is just how terrible these schools are. The second is the lengths to which public school teachers, administrators, and union officials will go in order to prevent any infringement on their education monopoly. And the third point is the extraordinary importance of fighting the battles over school choice on numerous fronts. Passing legislation or even winning the subsequent court battles means nothing if parents and students are left in the dark about the opportunities open to them.

Bolick's account of the 12 years between the institution of Milwaukee's pilot voucher program, in which 1,000 of the children in the city's worst schools would receive $2,500 to pay tuition at a local nonsectarian school, and his victory in *Zelman v. Harris*, last spring, in which the Supreme Court upheld the Constitutionality of Cleveland's voucher program for 4,000 schoolchildren, is a dramatic one. The many courtroom scenes that Bolick describes could just as well have come straight out of the movies. A summer day in Madison, Wisconsin: "The courtroom was packed, half with white bureaucrats, and the other half with black parents and children sporting their school choice buttons. Though the judge had managed to get the courtroom open for a rare Saturday hearing, the air-conditioning was off and the heat was oppressive." Then there was the Christmas Eve scene where Bolick's flight was canceled, and he ar-rived for oral arguments in the last rental car at the airport, driven by a pilot, "with minutes to spare."

As for the coalition of lawyers, professors, parents, researchers, teachers, principals, and philanthropists who now make up the national school choice movement, they have not always been so many in number or so willing to cooperate with each other. Bolick presents what seems a winning coalition—what other issue unites inner-city black parents with white, conservative think-tank nerds?—but it's easy to see how friction can arise. Bolick refers more than once to the parents he represents as "salt-of-the-earth people," a phrase that easily sounds condescending. One is tempted to chalk up this kind of language to a certain corny tone that pervades the book, as when he finds his Washington office flooded with water and remarks, "I asked myself, 'Clint, what have you gotten yourself into?'"

But some parts of the book simply

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sound bizarre. In one anecdote, Bolick recounts how, during a tour of a poor neighborhood, he and his black hosts "see a large man who appeared to be mentally retarded striking an elderly woman with her purse." When he suggests that they stop to help her, his host replies, "When I go into y'all's neighborhoods, I see strange things too, like people watering their lawns. But I don't stop and tell them what they should be doing." Bolick reflects that he was "chastened and educated" by this incident "and not for the last time." Just what this story is meant to illustrate is surely a mystery, but it certainly makes it easy to imagine it causing offense, as if for blacks, beating old ladies is as natural as watering lawns is for whites.

But it is not just miscommunication that wracks the school-choice proponents. There are substantive issues over which Bolick's allies disagree, like the extent to which religious schools should be subsidized and subject to state regulations, the usefulness of charter schools, and the need to fight for choice in areas that are not poor.

Bolick has done well unifying these factions and concludes his book with a call for extending choice broadly and deeply. Though he remains concerned with the legal challenges at the state level and supports more extensive research on the effects of school choice, he explains:

> I think the movement's successes have been limited not because they are ambitious but because they are not ambitious enough. Instead of presenting school choice as a distinct educational reform, we should encompass it within a broader discussion of educational funding and school choice. After all, it is only by extending school choice to a larger constituency that we can feel truly confident about preserving our gains and improving through market competition the overall quality of education.

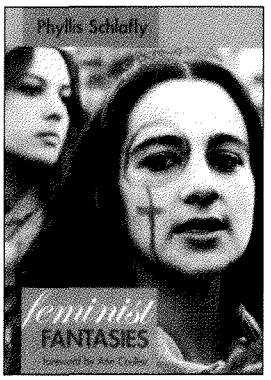
Ultimately, whatever Bolick's shortcomings as an author, inner-city children and parents are lucky to have a lawyer as talented and devoted to their cause as him.

Naomi Schaefer is an adjunct fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

THIS WOMAN'S WORK

By Courtney Richard

Feminist Fantasies
By Phyllis Schlafly
Spence Publishing, 256 pages, $27.95



Courses in women's studies carefully avoid mention of Phyllis Schlafly, a living example of how women really can have it all. A graduate of Washington University Law School in St. Louis and an ardent critic of feminism, Schlafly led the ten-year campaign against the Equal Rights Amendment. For 30 years she has attacked feminist claims on issues such as motherhood, women in the military, and the role of women in society. Her most recent book, *Feminist Fantasies*, collects many of her writings from the past three decades. In the book, she argues that the feminist movement ignores "common sense, the realities of human nature, the dignity of marriage, and respect for the wives at home," and calls for a return to "traditional moral standards."

Feminists, Schlafly charges, "cover themselves with victim status," while claiming that "they are so macho that they can do anything a man can do." She derides feminist attempts to use government policy to further women's careers, pointing out that women's independent choices are responsible for discrepancies in average pay and in the number of female CEOs, not oppression by an imagined patriarchy. But because feminists view these discrepancies as evidence of discrimination, they insist on independence from men and "run to Big Brother Government as a replacement."

Schlafly yearns for a return to the nuclear family of the 1950s. While a stable, loving family remains the dream of most Americans, Schlafly takes the idealized image too far. She insists that women must have children if they are to have meaningful lives, recounting tales of childless women who realize their "mistake" only after it is too late. Divorced women, lesbians, and single mothers also earn Schlafly's wrath as she condemns all those who have chosen a non-traditional family life. She refuses to recognize the positive outcomes of the feminist movement, giving ammunition to those on the Left who claim that anti-feminists advocate female oppression.

Schlafly argues that the feminist crusade has robbed Americans of the special privileges they once enjoyed as men and women. She describes how women are no longer treated as fragile, venerated creatures, and are instead subjected to dirty language and forced into the workplace. Men also lose out, she says, since they can no longer depend on housewives to cook their meals and iron their shirts. Schlafly says that this move toward a "gender-neutral society" is "based on the unnatural ideology that there is no difference between men and women."

Schlafly also believes it is unnatural for women to serve in the military. While she concedes that some areas of the armed forces should be open to the fairer sex, she staunchly opposes women in combat. Women, she insists, much prefer to let men protect them from the dangers of the world. Schlafly's argument here is especially weak. Clearly some women do *not* prefer to have men do the fighting for them, or they would not enlist in the first place.

Ironically, like the feminists she criticizes, Schlafly uses gender to determine the appropriate course of people's lives. While some feminists argue that all women should work and never marry, Schlafly would prefer that all women

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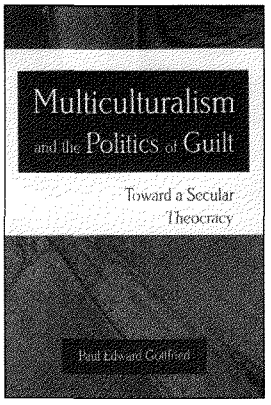
marry and never work. Her extremist views in some areas risk alienating truly independent women, who believe that they can succeed without the help of the state and without the help of a husband.

Courtney Richard is a senior at the University of Massachusetts.

VICTORY THROUGH GUILT

By John Attarian

Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt: Toward a Secular Theocracy
By Paul Edward Gottfried
University of Missouri Press,
158 pages, $24.95



Multiculturalism has emerged from politically correct academe to shape every major Western institution, from schools and churches to government and corporations. Why is this movement triumphing virtually unresisted?

In his learned and challenging new book, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt*, Elizabethtown College professor Paul Gottfried advances a controversial but plausible explanation. In *After Liberalism*, Gottfried examined liberalism's transformation into a movement based on egalitarian social democracy, a movement that relied on a "managerial state" for social engineering. Contemporary liberalism now takes social engineering even further through a "therapeutic" state "increasingly preoccupied with modifying social behavior." And guilt-ridden liberal Christianity predisposes Westerners to submit to multiculturalist abuse. How did multiculturalism triumph? "A transformation of the self-image of the majority population would have to had take place in order for the therapeutic state to have reached its present strength," believes Gottfried. Among the causes of the change, he argues, is "an altered religious consciousness that has affected the Protestant majorities" in the English-speaking world.

Protestantism, he observes, has a long history of public rites of penance and confession of guilt, a stress on sinful dispositions, flaunting of guilt as proof of "virtuous intention," and a separation of the saved from the damned. All of these are readily adaptable to political correctness. Indeed, "absent a Protestant culture of social guilt and of individuals ashamed of their collective past, the therapeutic state could not have taken the hold it has." Moreover, he notes, religious education among American Christians has collapsed. Ill-informed, uninterested in the Bible or theology, and holding traditional Christian beliefs lightly, they easily accept multiculturalist dogmas in familiar Christian guise, as in the case of the many mainstream Christians who endorse gay rights.

Gottfried is on to something. The devotees of multiculturalism, simultaneously guilt-ridden and self-righteous, eerily resemble the holier-than-thou Protestant moral crusaders of yore. Christians can so idealize self-sacrifice, altruism, and a submissiveness to outrages that their behavior often resembles masochism. This has taught Westerners to be sensitive to victims and to feel guilty for their suffering, while viewing self-sacrificial, self-abasing atonement as a means to be moral.

Gottfried criticizes "establishment" conservatives such as Gertrude Himmelfarb for seeing multiculturalism as a purely intellectual phenomenon infecting politics and for ignoring the way modern states can shape culture. "The political class has adopted inclusiveness and diversity as a political instrument," to control the society it is reconstructing. Since the American state has enforced much of the '60s revolution through such things as affirmative action, court decisions broadening the rights of non-citizens, the barring of discrimination against unmarried co-habitators, homosexuals, etc., Gottfried's point is sound.

While European multiculturalism imitates ours, he observes, the Europeans have taken suppression of politically incorrect views even further. The European Union forces multicultural conformity on member nations, lessening the distinction between European countries. Western governments, Gottfried reports, are exporting multiculturalism, seeking "nothing less then the transformation of human consciousness." Though he does not say so, all of this takes humanity toward the bland, homogenized dystopia of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

The therapeutic regime, Gottfried observes, "requires its subjects to behave unnaturally, despising their ancestry and inherited morals" while at least pretending to learn from other groups and heterodox lifestyles. As it forces people to go against the grain of human nature, an eventual backlash seems plausible. But while right-wing resistance is emerging, especially in smaller European nations, Gottfried deems its prospects poor, given its persecution by governments and demonization by the media. Rather, he speculates that multiculturalism may self-destruct. The ruling elites' secular religiosity seems to blind them to the fact that through their open-immigration policies they are importing hostile, disruptive populations which may topple them.

Gottfried's gloomy analysis rings true. Guilty self-laceration is undeniably demanded of those in the West, and a mawkish, masochistic religious outlook facilitates this weakness. Given the docility of Western populations and the demonization of dissenters, it is hard to see what, short of immigration-spawned Balkanization or economic catastrophe, could stop the multiculturalist juggernaut.

John Attarian is the author of Social Security: False Consciousness and Crisis.

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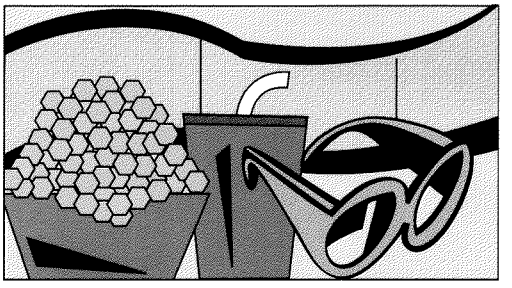
Beat the Summer Movie Hype



Julie Ann Roache

Like the blazing summer sun, the media and marketing blitz surrounding Hollywood's hottest season can be searing.

Event movies are trumpeted as the biggest thing to come along in the history of the planet—then quickly forgotten in favor of the next weekend's biggest thing to come along in the history of the planet. (*Pearl Harbor*, where have you gone?)

Amidst all this hot air, it's hard for regular filmgoers—who used to be able to enjoy a summer movie for the movie's sake—not to get burned. As protection, here are some tips that can serve as cinematic sunscreen.

Focus on the films

Consider what accompanies the average blockbuster-to-be these days: Endless magazine covers, countless TV commercials, Web-based promotional campaigns, fast-food tie-ins, and Top 40 music from the soundtrack are just a few of the elements in a studio's omnipresent marketing campaign. Like Los Angeles' smog, the promotion of a major summer film hangs in the air so heavily we can hardly breathe.

From the studio's perspective, a movie's only worth is its ability to lure you into the theaters. So slick trailers, big-name stars, and a catchy title are more valuable than the actual film. Publicists act as carnival barkers—they'll shout until they're hoarse just to get you into the tent, even though what you see turns out to be Austin Powers in *Goldmember*.

All of this hoopla happens before we even get to see the movie, which is treated as an afterthought. Last summer, Americans lived and breathed *Men in Black 2* for months before it arrived. No wonder I was sick of the picture before I even saw a single frame.

Avoiding such a situation requires blinders, so to speak. Even if you're excited about June's *The Hulk*, a comic-book adaptation from eclectic auteur Ang Lee, limit how many magazine puff pieces about it you read—or at least the number of Hulk shakes you buy at your local burger joint. This way, when the movie finally arrives, you'll still be eager to see it—which was the point in the first place.

Ignore the box office

Box-office reports are rarely a good judge of a movie's quality, especially during the summer. When a film debuts in first place—or, as we often hear, breaks financial records—more often than not it's an indication of the marketing campaign's success and little else.

By touting first-place standings, the studios are essentially telling you that almost everyone else in America went to see their movie last weekend except you. The implication is that if you don't race out to catch up with their film, you'll be hopelessly out of it. But really, does anyone feel any shame for skipping last year's *Scooby-Doo*?

Trust friends and critics

Who, then, should you listen to? In the summer, word of mouth is crucial. If you can resist seeing a movie on opening weekend, track down someone who couldn't and get his reaction. He'll certainly be more honest than the studio publicists and entertainment "journalists" who have been buzzing in your head.

Beyond that, find a critic you trust—not one of those elitists who thinks only subtitled movies are worth seeing, but someone who recognizes a popular work of art when he or she sees one. Even in the mindless days of summer, they exist, as the critical and popular success *Spider-Man* demonstrated last year.

Lower your expectations

That said, the ratio of good movies to bad ones in June, July, and August isn't very encouraging. If summer is a showcase for Hollywood, it's also somewhat of a dumping ground, the time to unleash endless titles on us in hopes that one will stick.

One way to enjoy what gets tossed your way is not to expect too much. Instead of great expectations, the summer should be a time of pleasant surprises. When *Charlie's Angels* came out a few years back, who knew it would not only be bearable, but even a lot of fun? Of course, this doesn't mean that you should rush for the theater when *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* opens in June. Something tells me lowered expectations—along with each of the summer-movie tips above—will be essential for this one.

—Josh Larsen

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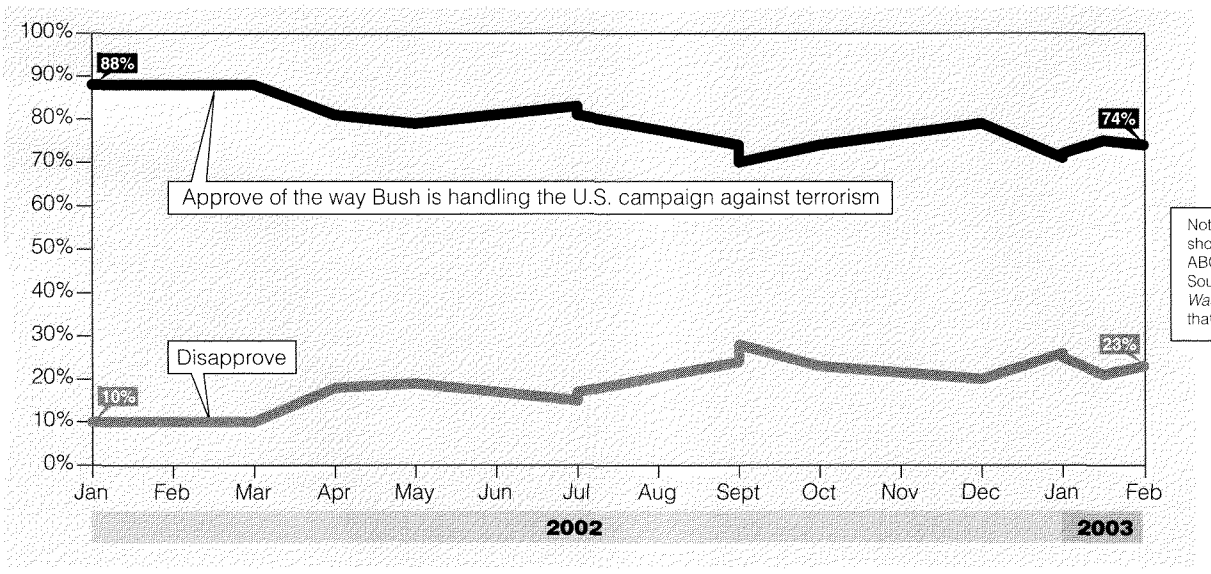
Opinion Pulse

Edited by Karlyn Bowman

The War on Terror: An Update

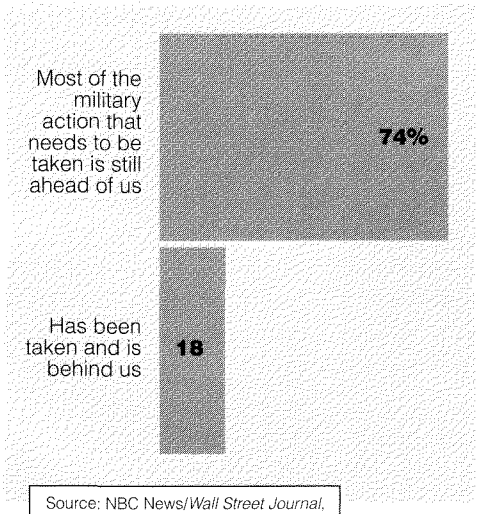
President Bush continues to receive high marks from Americans on handling the war on terror. The recognition that this will be a long and difficult struggle has set in. Large majorities believe that most of the military action that will need to be taken in the war on terror is still ahead of us. Today, around four in ten say neither side is winning this war. Of the remainder, more say the U.S. is prevailing than say the terrorists are.

Question: Do you...?



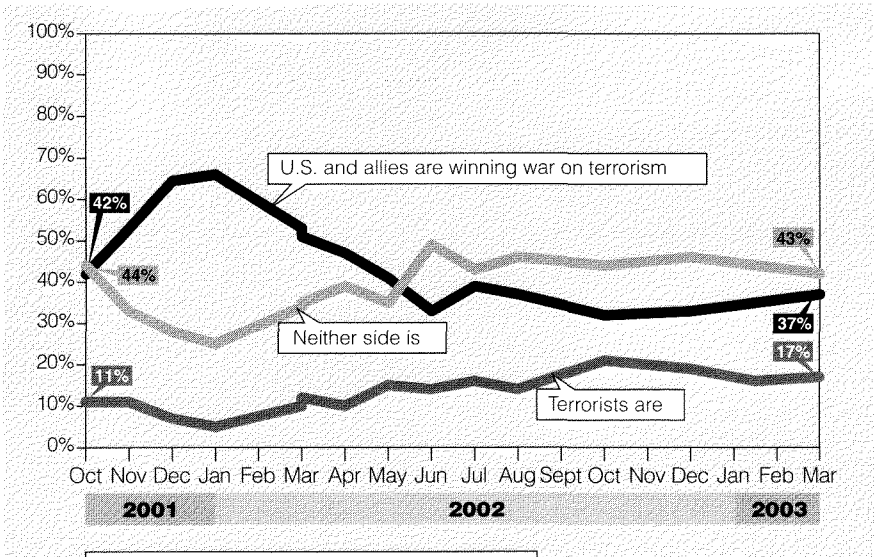
Note: Some of the surveys shown here were taken by ABC News alone.
Source: ABC News/ *Washington Post*, latest that of February 2003.

Question: When it comes to taking military action in the war against terrorism, do you think...?



Source: NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*, September 2002.

Question: Who do you think...?



Source: Gallup, CNN, *USA Today*, latest that of March 2003.

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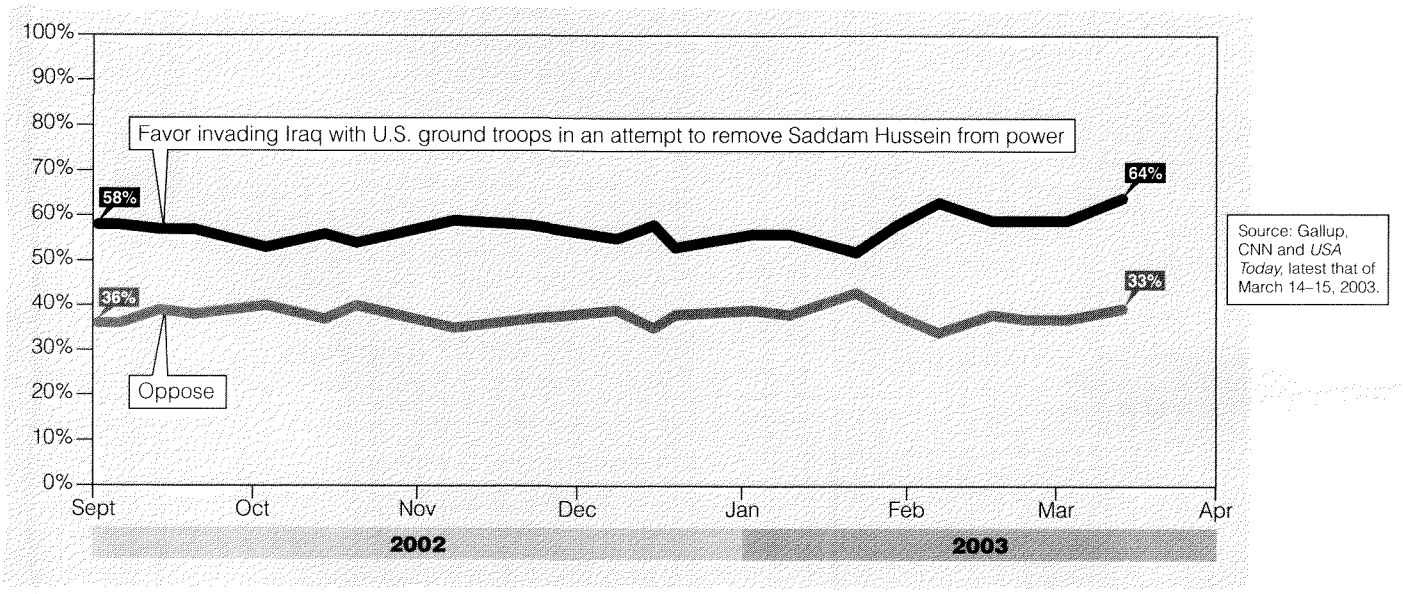
Going to War With Iraq

Americans made up their minds early about war with Iraq, and as the chart below shows, they hardly wavered in their positions during the contentious discussions in Washington last fall and early this year. One explanation for consistent public support for action is the high confidence Americans have in the U.S. military. Sixteen percent say they are veterans, and 50 percent say they know someone who has been deployed to the Middle East.

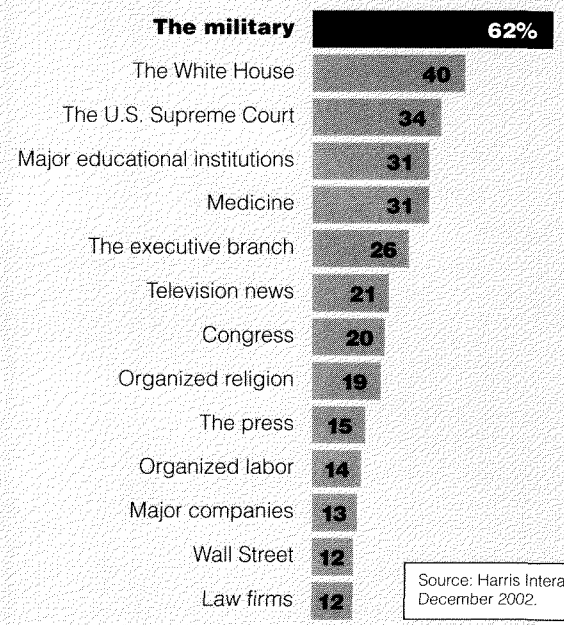
Question: Would you...?



Source: Gallup, CNN and *USA Today*, latest that of March 14–15, 2003.

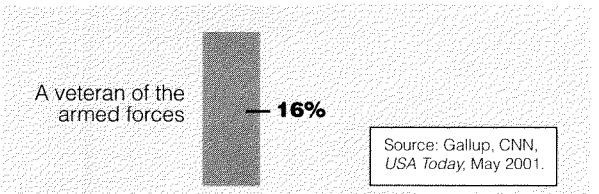
Question: As far as the people in charge of running..., would you say you have...?

Have a great deal of confidence in the people in charge of running



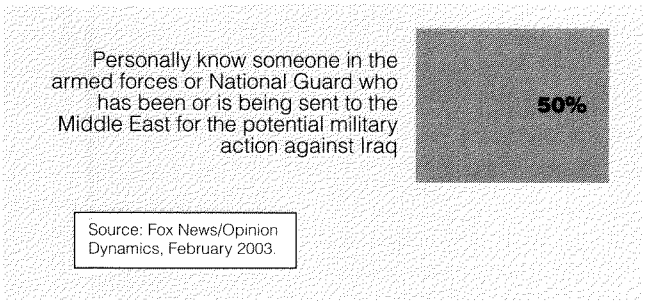
Source: Harris Interactive, December 2002.

Question: Are you personally...?



Source: Gallup, CNN, *USA Today*, May 2001.

Question: Do you...?



Source: Fox News/Opinion Dynamics, February 2003.

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The Media and the War

The media aren't as highly regarded as the military, as the chart on the previous page shows. Still, solid majorities describe the coverage of the war against terrorism as excellent or good. Sixty percent say coverage of the administration's policies on terrorism has been about right. During wartime, the government's ability to control information trumps a free press. People want war coverage to be neutral, not pro-American. The rules have changed about journalists' access to war zones. In late March, 57 percent said reporters traveling with the troops was a good idea.

Question: In general, how would you rate...?

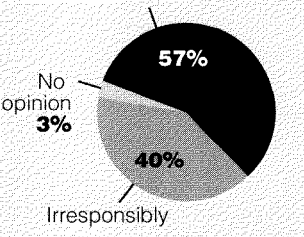
Press coverage of the terrorist attacks and the war against terrorism has been

	Excellent	Good
September 2001	56%	33%
early October	48	37
late October	32	42
November	30	47
December	32	45
April–May 2002	29	48

Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, latest that of April–May 2002.

Question: Overall, do you feel...?

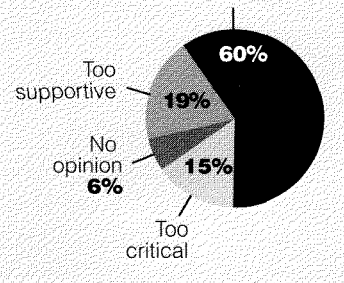
The news media have acted responsibly in handling recent threats of terrorism in the United States



Source: The Gallup Organization, February 2003.

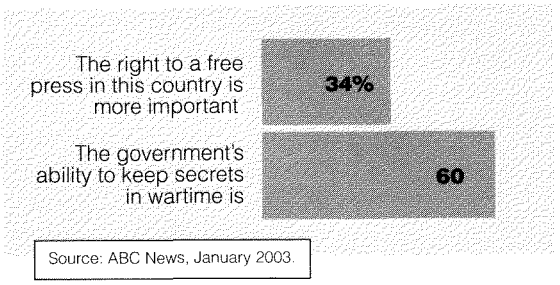
Question: In covering the war on terrorism, do you think...?

Media have been about right in coverage of the Bush administration and the war on terrorism



Source: ABC News, January 2003.

Question: If you had to pick...?



Source: ABC News, January 2003.

Question: In your opinion, which is...?

	Better that news coverage of the war be pro-American	Better that it be neutral
March 1991	22%	71%
February 2003	16	78

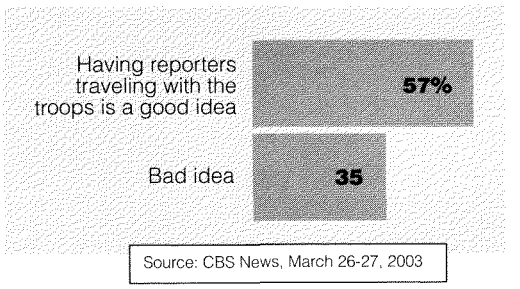
Source: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, latest that of February 2003.

Question: If there is an American military action..., do you...?

	Think a pool of American reporters should be allowed to accompany American forces to combat zones	Think the press should be restricted
1983	63%	28%
1984	59	31
1991 (pre-Gulf War)	57	34
2003 (pre-Iraq War)	49	45

Source: *Los Angeles Times* (1983), Gallup/*Newsweek* (1984), and Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, latest that of February 2003.

Question: As you may know, many news reporters are traveling along with U.S. troops and reporting directly from the battlefield. From what you have seen or heard, do you think...?



Source: CBS News, March 26-27, 2003

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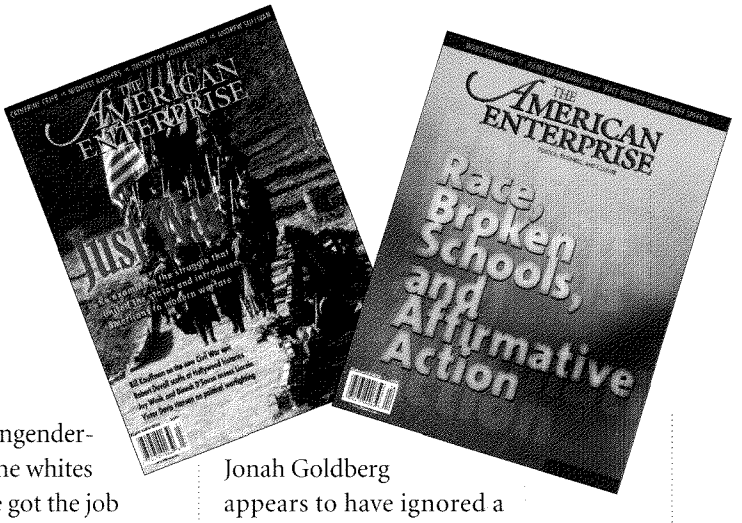
the Mail



As a teacher who has been fired for simply having upheld the same standards for all of my students, I appreciated your April/May issue—particularly John McWhorter's attack on racial preferences in education ("Don't Do Me Any Favors").

Attending elementary school in the early '60s, I clearly remember the racist attitudes of my white classmates. They used the term "nigger" lavishly and thought it odd that I didn't. My parents had taught me that people were to be respected as people, and racial epithets were not tolerated.

As a result of having grown up without internalizing racial prejudice, I was left with a curious blind spot when I became a public school teacher: It never occurred to me to hold any student to a lower standard simply because he or she was not white.

Those white liberals who grew up with racist attitudes—including, I'm certain, many of my childhood friends—now feel a need to atone for their bigotry by lowering the bar for non-white students. By that very act of condescension, they affirm the racist attitudes for which they want to atone.

Ed Schubert
Parker, Arizona

John McWhorter's piece is outstanding in every detail. I am white, and I do not feel guilty about it. I am, however, ashamed that many people think that blacks can only succeed if whites help them. Why can't they see how paternalistic this is?

I have witnessed the effects of affirmative action on blacks in the workplace. It serves only to lower the self-esteem of the "beneficiary" while engendering resentment among the whites who know that someone got the job without having to work for it.

Mike Betts
Grattan Township, Michigan

Kudos to Frederick Hess ("Sweeten the Pot for Middle America," April/May) for publicly addressing the roadblock to school choice that many advocates discuss only among themselves: suburbanites' fear that vouchers for inner-city children will weaken their own children's schools.

But while "sweetening the pot" for suburbanites is a sensible strategy, Hess's suggestion that we offer a tax deduction to homeowners who "feel" that choice has lowered the value of their homes isn't practical or politically feasible.

A better strategy would be to make sure that vouchers or tax credits support educational options not currently available in many suburban schools.

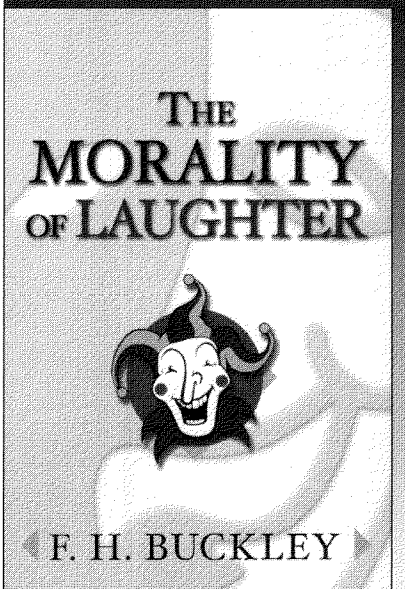
Robert Holland
Lexington Institute
Arlington, Virginia

Jonah Goldberg appears to have ignored a crucial fact in his condemnation of the United Nations (BEAT THE PRESS, April/May).

When the U.N. votes our way, people who seem to share Goldberg's view say it has great moral authority. When it does not, it's branded an incompetent organization run by small countries full of terrorists.

Elizabeth Twitchell
Alexandria, Virginia

"Bravo! I'll say nothing funny about it, for it is a superior piece of work."
—P. J. O'Rourke



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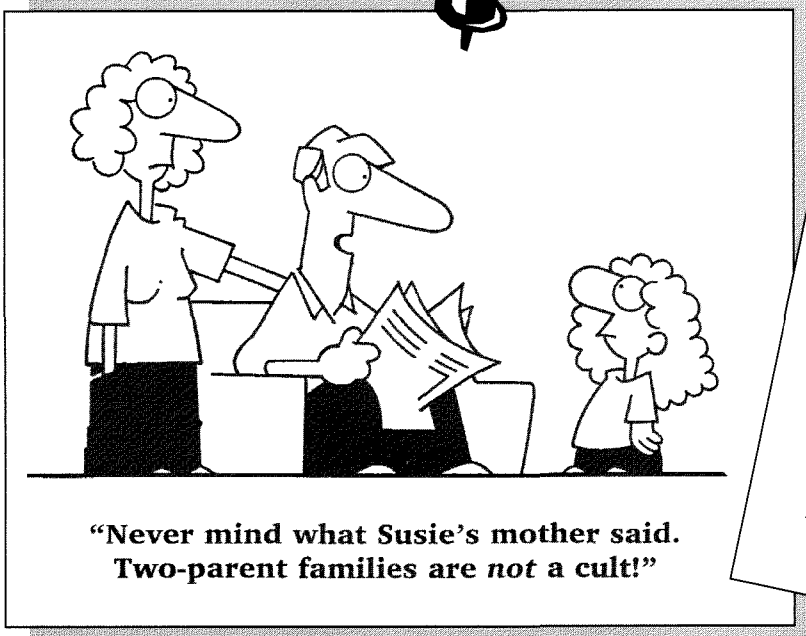
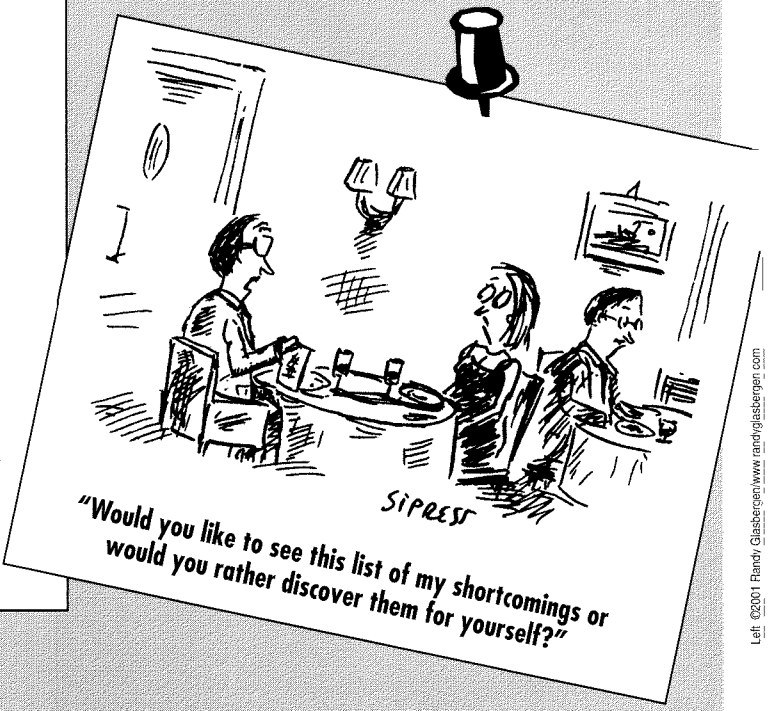


"Never mind what Susie's mother said. Two-parent families are *not* a cult!"



"Would you like to see this list of my shortcomings or would you rather discover them for yourself?"

Left ©2001 Randy Glasbergen/www.randyglasbergen.com

"I lift the same weights I did when I was young, only now I can't put them down."

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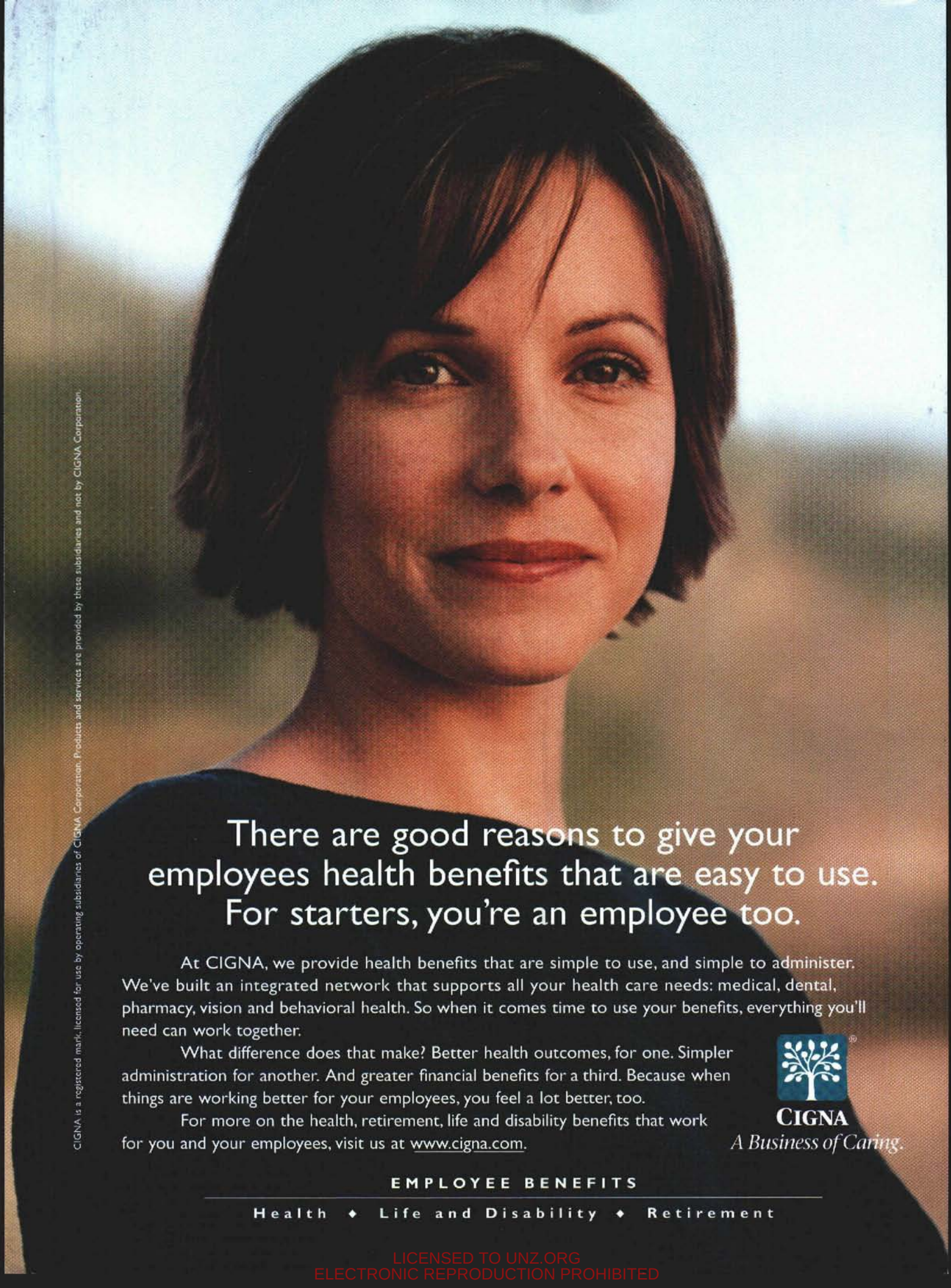

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